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# Language And Literacy Acquisition And Maintenance Of Sudanese Refugee Learners

LaVerne Kingsbury

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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE OF  
SUDANESE REFUGEE LEARNERS

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May  
2007



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This dissertation, submitted by LaVerne Kingsbury in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Dean of the Graduate School

May 7, 2007

Date

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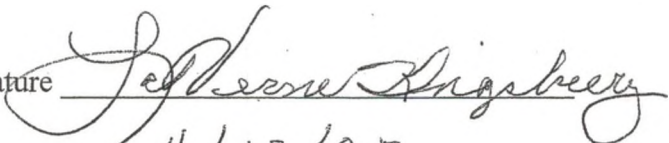
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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Acculturation: Cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture; *also*: a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact (*Merriam-Webster Online*).

Assimilation: “The process whereby a group, as a minority or immigrant group, gradually adopts the characteristics of another culture” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1982, p. 135).

Bilingual: Ability to process two languages and understand messages and respond appropriate in both languages (Williams & Snipper, 1990).

Biliterate: Ability to read and write in two languages (Williams & Snipper, 1990).

Colloquial Arabic: An adapted language using people’s own pronunciations and idiosyncrasies of the region.

Culture: “The unique experiences and history of various ethnic groups” (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2000, p. 25).

ELL: English Language Learners, or those learners whose first language is something other than English.

ESL: English as a Second Language; less accurate than ELL, since many immigrants speak more than one language before learning English. Purpose is to teach English-language vocabulary, structure, grammar, and oral communication. It is not to teach new content material (Williams & Snipper, 1990).



Ethnography: Type of research in which the researcher immerses him/herself in the culture which is being studied.

Formal networking: Contacting and meeting with school and social service administrators to explain the study, submit paperwork when required, and obtain lists of potential participants for the study.

Grounded theory: A type of qualitative research in which the researcher begins without a preconceived theory or hypothesis; theory emerges from data collected through multiple vantage points.

Informal networking: Establishing relationships with potential participants who lived or congregated in the area.

Language: Any system of symbols that is used to transmit meaning (Bromley, 1988).

Linguistic diversity: Different languages, some of which have more power and prestige than others.

Literacy: Ability to read and write at a level allowing one to function successfully in a culture.

Microethnography: A study focused on a specific aspect of a cultural group and setting (Creswell, 2002).

Multilingual: Using or able to speak several languages with equal fluency.

Multiliterate: Ability to read and write in several languages with fluency.

Non-refugee: Someone who is not a refugee; the more current term is voluntary immigrant.

Refugee: Someone who is seeking or taking refuge, especially from war or persecution, by going to another country.

Qualitative research: Research which is often exploratory in nature using methods that are more open-ended focusing on behavior, attitudes, and motivation. Data are viewed from multiple perspectives and analyzed systematically using coding systems. Results are expressed through assertions rather than numerically.

Tourist curriculum: Considered to be a cursory look at cultural difference on a surface level that may inadvertently lead to stereotyping.

Voluntary immigrant: One who comes by choice to settle in another country.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the language and literacy goals and values of a linguistically diverse Southern Sudanese refugee population residing in the Upper Midwest portion of the United States. The linguistic and cultural demographics of the area's major school district changed consistently and dramatically over a twenty-year time span. Five participants who were parents of young children were interviewed for this study from a metropolitan community with a population of approximately 200,000. Fourteen percent of the English Language Learners (ELL) in the public schools were Sudanese.

Qualitative research methods included an ethnographic approach in order to access the population for potential participants. The ethnographic components of this study took place in church settings attended by members of the Sudanese community and the researcher. Additional qualitative research methods used were participant and setting observations, formal interviews, and written and recorded data collecting when permission was granted.

Issues that related to goals parents held for their children, as well as languages and literacies used in home, school, and social settings, surfaced during this study. Each participant's story was told individually using a narrative format that described (a) background information, (b) language use in the home, school, and social settings, and (c) language and literacy goals and values. Five themes emerged from this study:

1. Male participants had higher levels of formal education than female participants and actively pursued educational advancement and support for Sudanese located in the USA or Sudan.
2. All participants were multilingual, most were multiliterate, and all used multiple languages in the home.
3. All participants in this study wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy.
4. Most participants in this study wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language as part of their culture.
5. Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language.

The study concluded with suggestions for further research, as well as implications for teacher education, for schools, and for classroom practice.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study explores issues of language and literacy in a Sudanese refugee community living in the Upper Midwest of the United States. Five parents of children ranging in age from five through eight were interviewed for this qualitative study. The parents, who spoke a variety of tribal languages, along with Arabic and English, had escaped their war-torn nation and were now raising their families in the United States. In narrative style, this study documents their beliefs, values, and aspirations for their children in terms of multilingualism and multiliteracies.

#### What Led Me to This Study

I am a U.S. born educator with 34 years' experience teaching children in grade kindergarten through grade four. During these years, I was secure in the belief that my professional philosophy reflected my values and appreciation for learning within a humanistic setting. However, as I gradually began to learn more and more about educating children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, I found myself questioning some of the teaching practices that I had espoused for decades. From the onset of my elementary field experience in 1964 to the year 1981, I did not teach a single student who spoke a language other than English in the home or whose culture varied dramatically from my own. I was teaching in the same community as the one in which I did my dissertation study; however, in the aforementioned years the community was



largely homogenous. Beginning in 1980, the linguistic and cultural demographics of the school district changed consistently and dramatically. I wanted to conduct a study that would provide administrators and teachers with information regarding language and literacy use in home and social settings in a segment of their student refugee population. Such information would enhance their ability to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

I also had additional professional and personal reasons for wanting to conduct this study. My teaching style included the use of student cross-support and cooperative learning. Such methods could provide a natural framework for honoring and recognizing linguistic and cultural plurality among student populations. Binding students together as a classroom community was imperative to me as I developed a learning environment for each ensuing student group. Having reached the end of my career in elementary teaching, I felt I had missed an opportunity to guide future generations of elementary students to a pluralistic awareness that was their student population reality. I felt that information gleaned from refugee parent interviews would help me understand what parents wanted for their children in the areas of language and literacy learning. Analysis of interview data would provide me with the answers I sought. I hope to use the findings from this research to help bridge refugee student needs with heightened teacher awareness of how to meet those needs in a classroom setting. I hope to develop teaching methods that are functional and practical for those who teach and those who hope to teach

In 1981 I experienced my first immigrant student, Soo-Kee, a female second grader of Korean ethnicity whose parents were connected with a local university.

Soo-Kee's first language was Korean; she spoke Korean fluently and could also read Korean at a first grade reading level. Soo-Kee was able to communicate haltingly in English when we met and was at the beginning stages of phonetic English literacy. She had the ability to associate some sounds with their corresponding letters and to blend two to four sounds into words. Not knowing how to teach reading to an English language learner, I used pictures and actions to accompany individually-prepared lessons in order to facilitate Soo-Kee's comprehension of reading material. Soo-Kee progressed rapidly in literacy learning. She worked diligently and kept her eyes downcast when we communicated. When I commented on her rapid learning pace due to her hard work, Soo-Kee told me she was learning to read much faster than her twin brother who was in another classroom. She said he was lazy and wanted to play rather than work.

During our first meeting, Soo-Kee's parents established their academic goals for their daughter. They wanted Soo-Kee to speak and read English fluently. Their goals matched my own and those of the school district I represented. Though I considered myself to be an excellent educator, in this instance I failed to exercise a basic tenet of the teaching profession. I failed to establish what a student already knew about language and literacy, and to activate or even recognize her prior knowledge as something of value. I did not use Soo-Kee's Korean literacy as a bridge to English literacy, nor did I honor her Korean language and culture in our activities. I was, however, teaching with the knowledge base I had at the time, reflecting attitudes shared by many of my professional peers. Most monolingual English-speaking educators in my peer group viewed students who lacked English proficiency as having a language deficit affecting their content area learning. We addressed the perceived deficit by complete immersion in English language



and literacy. In this instance the practice matched the values and goals of Soo-Kee's parents.

The three children I subsequently taught from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds called into question some of my former beliefs. From the fall of 1988 through the spring of 1989 I taught in a city on Florida's Gulf Coast. There I met Maria, a student in my fourth grade class who was the daughter of migrant workers. The family earned their income by following crop harvests from south to north every school year. Maria struggled with reading comprehension and content area concept development. Frequent moves caused a lack of continuity in her education. Her parents wanted her to become proficient in English language and literacy while maintaining her native language. This was my first experience with a student who was not only an English language learner, but also was economically challenged and subject to frequent moves. Though I did what I could, I recall feeling Maria needed more specific academic support than I was able to provide at the time. I also did not know how to address her parents' desire for maintaining their native language.

Additional members of Maria's fourth grade class also struggled with reading comprehension and content area learning, in part because of their limited English abilities and their cultural backgrounds. Correspondingly, poverty was an issue in the case of Manuel, who did his homework and spent each school evening in the parked family car along with his sister. The children waited for their mother in the parking lot of the gas station where she worked. Their mother could not afford childcare and wanted to have the children near her rather than to leave them home alone. I believe English as well as native languages were spoken in these children's homes, but I did not check to make

sure. It did not occur to me to do so, nor did it occur to me to capitalize on the richness provided by their linguistic and cultural diversity. Jennifer's Native American ancestry which linked her lineage to Miccosukee royalty could have provided many connections for academic learning had I thought to use her background to stimulate her learning. Teaching Maria, Manuel, and Jennifer allowed me to experience firsthand the challenges presented to diverse language learners in the public schools. Due to a job offer up north, I left Florida feeling frustrated at not having been able to make a greater impact on the literacy and content area learning of my fourth grade students of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Returning to the Midwest, from 1989 until 2000 I taught seven students who spoke or were exposed to languages other than English in their home settings. During this time frame, however, I made changes in curriculum that acknowledged the cultural diversity of class members. I expanded student learning by identifying native countries' locations, climates, terrains, and people's traditional modes of dress and holidays. Only later did I discover that the weakness of this method of addressing cultural diversity was referred to as a *tourist curriculum* (Derman-Sparks, 1989). A tourist curriculum is considered to be a cursory look at cultural difference on a surface level. Though native language and literacies were not honored nor incorporated into the tourist curriculum, I did introduce folk and fairy tales from the native countries represented in our classroom. The folk and fairy tales were shared and students were challenged to identify similarities and differences between English folk and fairy tales and those found in other countries represented by members in our class.

As with Soo-Kee, I prepared and presented individual reading lessons for Laetitia from Djibouti. French was her native language and she was very quiet when the school year began. The folk and fairy tales, however, helped her to connect. She worked very hard at practicing English literacy with classmate volunteers using low level vocabulary folk and fairy tales as her reading material. Her progress throughout the year was admirable. In the spring she was an active class participant who loved to help with class projects. Our class play was a cooperative effort that caused all students to help with props. All had speaking parts, including Laetitia.

Banks (1999) suggests four different approaches to multicultural curriculum:

1. Contributions approach

Heroes, holidays, discrete cultural elements

2. Additive approach

Content, concepts, themes are added to the curriculum without changing its structure

3. Transformation approach

Structure of curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse cultural groups

4. Social action approach

Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them. (p. 31)

I was only working at the first two levels above (contributions, additive approach) at the end of my career in elementary education.



Throughout my elementary teaching career, I had always placed great emphasis on parent involvement. However, in hindsight, I did not attempt to involve parents or relatives whose first language was not English unless they were invited as guests who informed students about customs, mode of dress, location, economy, climate, and terrain of their native country (part of the tourist or contributions curriculum). I shied away from excessive communication with parents whose English language speaking ability was difficult for me to understand, perhaps in part because of my hearing disability. Learning from graduate level courses I took at the time made me aware that I was under-serving students and parents of linguistic diversity who were a part of my classroom communities. Post retirement from elementary teaching in 2000, I began teaching in higher education and entered a graduate study program to attain a Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning. Coursework in multicultural education, advanced qualitative research, and the language and literacy learning of diverse learners increased my exposure to the needs and desires of parents and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

#### Need for Research

The consistent growth of linguistic diversity in the United States public schools demands that teacher education and scholarly research focus more on the home use of language and literacy as well as parent values and goals regarding language and literacy learning.

A research report summary by Thomas and Collier (2002) states, “Students whose home language is other than English is [*sic*] projected by the U.S. Census Bureau to be forty percent of the school-age population by the 2030s, and possibly sooner if present demographic trends continue” (p. 2). Several states such as California and Arizona

already have student populations where the majority of children come from homes where another language other than English is spoken.

Furthermore, as a result of No Child Left Behind testing, newly emerging statistics point to an alarming academic achievement gap between English Language Learner (ELL) and non-ELL populations. This is documented in *The Nation's Report Card* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), as well as state accountability reports. North Dakota, for example, has traditionally prided itself on its high level of high school graduates, roughly 86% of the student population. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in North Dakota, however, are only completing high school at a 66% rate. Statewide across all the grades, 74% of native-English speaking students are achieving at the proficient level in both math and reading. Students designated as LEP, however, are only achieving proficiency at levels of 45% for math and 43% for reading (*North Dakota State Profile*, 2006).

The rapid change in the linguistic background of the U.S. student population plus continued growth and low academic achievement rates for this population indicate a need for research addressing language and literacy practices of populations who speak a language other than English. Children learn language and emergent literacy skills in the home setting as they interact with family members who meet their personal needs, confirm their self identity, and establish patterns reflective of cultural values and beliefs (Edwards, 2004). Educators need the information parents can provide in order to make strong connections with what children with diverse language and literacy experiences know, what they need to learn, and how best to teach them. Parents know their children intimately before they enter the school setting. Berlinder (1986) wrote,

Teachers have no choice but to inquire into each student's unique cultural and learning history, to determine what instructional materials might best be used, and to determine when a student's cultural and life experiences are compatible or potentially incompatible with instruction. (p. 29)

### Theoretical Framework

This dissertation was based on sociocultural theory which acknowledged an interconnectedness of language, literacy, and culture. Sociocultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1930/1978) presented cognition as a profoundly social phenomenon. Social experiences shaped ways of thinking, and language was an indispensable tool used to express thought. It was the sociocultural view of language and literacy use in home, school, and social settings that shaped the interview questions of this study. See Appendices I and J to view interview questions.

With sociocultural theory in mind, it is prudent to consider significant rites of passage in children's early developmental years in general, and the early developmental years of bilingual or multilingual children specifically. Before starting school, children develop multiple identities within a family unit. "They are a son or daughter; brother, sister, only child or particular-placed sibling; Pakistani, Indian, Bengali, African, Caribbean, or English; friend of someone; and a young child" (Boyle & Woods, 1998, p. 93). "What is mediated through the family is the only reality that is known" (Woods, 1990, p. 145). When children enter the school arena, be it preschool or public school, it is their first *institutional* exposure to the outside world with an accompanying internalization of specific roles. The child now had the role of pupil, shaped not as a



negotiated role among child, teacher, and parent, but a role very much dependent on the teacher image of the “good pupil” (Waterhouse, 1991, p. 94).

In light of the school paradigm identifying the *good* or *ideal* pupil as one who speaks the dominant language, sociocultural theory introduces the idea of *empowerment* for linguistic and cultural minorities. For decades schools have perpetuated the marginalization of minority students. “Cultures other than those of the dominant group are treated as sub-standard, primitive, threatening, exotic, or at best irrelevant to American life” (Crawford, 2004, p. 198). An important part of the solution to such sociocultural inequities can be found in interventions that lead to the empowerment of minority students. Nieto (2002) addressed these issues in school settings when she said, “It is now evident that language, literacy and culture are linked in numerous ways and that all teachers – whether they teach preschool art or high school math – need to become knowledgeable in how they affect students’ schooling” (p. 1).

Teachers are now challenged with the responsibility of including minority student background knowledge in language, literacy, and culture into the school setting. In order to help students of diverse languages and cultures navigate the passage from what is known to them and to help them adapt what they know to a new language, culture, and setting, teachers need to access cultural and linguistic background knowledge from parents who know their children longer and best. It is up to the parents, teachers, and children of diverse languages and cultures who are in American school classroom settings to find a way to traverse the bridge from both sides.

The participants in this study felt that culture and language were inextricably bound together. In the words of one participant, “Language identifies who you are and

where you come from” (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 29, 2005).

Sociocultural theorists view human identity as intimately entwined and impacted by language, literacy, and culture. Identity of self as perceived by others has dramatic impact on student self esteem. Having teachers who recognize students’ language, literacy, and culture in school settings honors and nurtures the children of diverse languages and cultures. Also, teachers and students who begin to see the world through the eyes of the linguistically and culturally oppressed can become social action advocates.

### Choosing the Location for My Study

I chose to conduct this study in the same community in which I had taught for most of my elementary school career. The community of approximately 200,000 is an urban hub in a rural agricultural region of the Upper Midwest of the United States. In a twenty-year time span from 1984-2004, the major school district in the area (in which I taught) recorded an influx of students who were linguistically diverse and of refugee or voluntary immigrant status. The bar graph shown in Appendix B indicates consistent overall growth in linguistically diverse students who attained ELL support. It also shows the district’s need for increasing ELL services for more than twenty years. Precise classification separating refugee and voluntary immigrant students into separate subsets was not available. The heading, “Prairieville Refugee/Non-Refugee Student Count,” reflects popular use of the term *non-refugee* at the time the graph originated. A more politically correct current term for *non-refugee* status is *involuntary immigrant*. The pie chart shown in Appendix C provides a general breakdown of students by ethnicity in the



school district. Additional information classifying ethnicities according to place of origin, native language spoken, or additional languages spoken was not available.

Parents of students who were linguistically diverse and of refugee status came to this country because of need. They left war-torn countries to seek asylum elsewhere. Parents of students who were of linguistically diverse and of voluntary immigrant status came to this country by choice, seeking better work or educational opportunities. The school district had interest in my conducting research on the language and literacy practices of their immigrant and refugee families in order to more fully understand how to help the children in the public schools. In particular, the school district was interested in my researching the ethnic groups of children who were having the hardest time adjusting to school and achieving academically. The school district had not conducted any formal research addressing the values and goals refugee and voluntary immigrant parents held for their children. In addition, a literature search revealed a dearth of information specific to the ethnic populations which addressed parent values and goals regarding their children's language and literacy acquisition. These factors in addition to the researcher's personal and professional experiences added further credence to the need for such a study.

### Pilot Study Summary

During the summer of 2003, while I was enrolled in an advanced qualitative research course, I conducted a pilot study for this dissertation. Reflections on my final years in elementary school teaching, as well as information learned in courses, caused me to choose "Language and Literacy Acquisition and Maintenance in Diverse Cultures" as my topic for the pilot study. In the pilot study three parents with native languages other

than English were interviewed in order to ascertain the values and goals they held for their children regarding English and native language learning.

By happenstance, two participants were of voluntary immigrant status in the United States (here by choice), and one participant was of refugee status in the United States (here by need). Of the participants who came by choice, the first came to pursue graduate study in a doctoral program, while the second spent half of her early years to age nine in the United States and half in Mexico. After her father passed away, the second participant lived in the United States continuously after age nine. The third participant was of refugee status and had fled the war-torn country of Vietnam when she was twenty-two.

The research question guiding the pilot study was *What values or goals do parents of linguistically diverse learners have regarding language and literacy acquisition of their native and newly acquired languages?* I interviewed three parents of children who ranged in age from six to nine whose home settings were linguistically diverse; the participants were Mexican American, Korean, and Vietnamese. An unexpected outcome of the pilot study indicated different points of view between refugee and voluntary immigrant participants regarding native and English language acquisition and maintenance. The refugee participant of Vietnamese ethnicity revealed embarrassment because of the attention she and her peer group generated in public places such as shopping centers. When using their native language as they laughed and talked, she felt people looked at them in an unfriendly manner. She wanted to blend in to local society and later as a married woman with children wanted her children to be proficient in English so they would be accepted as a part of local society as well. Though

Vietnamese was still spoken in the home because the participant's mother who spoke no English lived with the family, preservation of language was not as paramount as it was for participants of voluntary immigrant status. These participants felt it was imperative to preserve language and culture. They actively worked at trying to maintain family native language and literacy to the best of their ability.

*Data From Mexican American Participant*

Sophia Lopez's daughter Juanita was eight years old at the time of the interview and twelve years younger than her only sibling. The elder child, Carlos, was fluent in both Spanish and English, having been totally immersed in Spanish language and literacy during early childhood. His grandmother lived in the family home eight months of the year to provide childcare for Carlos. Sophia and her husband Juan were unable to replicate Carlos' language experiences for Juanita because the majority of the child's daytime hours were spent with an English-speaking caregiver. By the age of eight, though she was still able to comprehend the Spanish language, Juanita could only respond in English to Spanish interchanges with her parents.

*Data From Korean Participant*

The second participant, Mi-Na Lee from Korea, reported on home language and literacy practices she and her husband Ki-Soo Kim followed to preserve their culture, language, and literacy for their son Ji-Woo.

While they attended a university as graduate students, Ki-Soo and Mi-Na shared the care of Ji-Woo throughout his early childhood. Since the university had a Korean population of approximately 500, the family often socialized with Korean-speaking



friends. Ji-Woo's parents valued a bilingual, biliterate, bicultural knowledge base for Ji-Woo, a kindergartener at the time of the interview.

#### *Data From Vietnamese Participant*

While the Mexican American and Korean families came to America by choice, the third participant sought asylum from a war-torn nation. Jennifer Phan, a Vietnamese American woman, shared her story of escaping from Vietnam with three of her siblings and being foster parented by an American family living in the Midwest.

Jennifer is now married with five children ranging in age from three to fifteen; she also has a sixteen year old foster child of Vietnamese ethnicity. Vietnamese is the main language used in the home. Her mother who lives with the family cannot speak English. Reflecting on early childhood communication practices, Jennifer related the following. "My child before enter school is we usually we speak both English and Vietnamese with them; what works best for them. Most of the time my children prefer English" (J. Phan, personal communication, July 7, 2003). Reflecting on her teenage children's attitudes and communication practices Jennifer said, "They don't like Vietnamese. They don't like to learn it. I think it's just because of they're lazy. They don't want learn two languages because they think it's too hard" (J. Phan, personal communication, July 7, 2003).

Pilot study findings fell under the headings of *culture, language and literacy*, and *values*. The first, regarding culture, indicated that support within the family unit was essential to the preservation of cultural values. These families also preferred childcare settings which provided usage of the family's native language.

Second, language and literacy findings revealed that language immersion at home during early childhood was crucial to the children's fluent acquisition of the family's native language. Reading to children also facilitated language acquisition. Participants' attitudes reflected a high regard for bilingualism. A conscious effort was made in both voluntary immigrants' home environments to maintain native language learning for their children.

Third, findings regarding values showed that subjects of diverse cultures took pride in the accomplishments of their children and siblings as success was achieved in their adopted country. The participant who came to America as a refugee supported the needs of others of her culture and "gave back" by foster parenting. She wanted to offer to others of her culture the opportunities that had been given to her.

Assertions drawn from the pilot study findings were as follows: Families of diverse cultures actively sought preservation of their cultural values through acquisition of native languages and literacies during their children's early childhood and preschool years. Families of diverse cultures who practiced language immersion of their native language with their young children secured native language life skills for their children.

As a result of this pilot study, and intrigued by the literacy and language practices of the refugee immigrant in particular, I decided to explore essentially the same original research question but focus specifically on refugee populations for my dissertation topic.

#### Original Intent of Research for This Study

The original intent of this research was to investigate the language and literacy values and goals held by six parents from three refugee populations having young children between the ages of five and eight. Participants of the Bosnian, Sudanese, and

Liberian ethnicities were chosen for the study as originally proposed because of their numeric impact on the student body in the metropolitan area chosen for the study. I decided to begin my research with Roma Bosnian refugees, because this population represented the largest segment of ethnically diverse refugee students new to the community.

Since I had no personal connections with the populations I wished to access, I used my networking capabilities with a school district in which I had been formerly employed in order to gain access to potential participants. I began by submitting a proposal which was accepted by the school district's curriculum director. I attempted access through the hierarchy of school connections with principals and teachers and through use of a Bosnian-speaking interpreter. Access was also attempted through use of educational or support services such as Head Start, the service oriented Charism Center designed to help the refugee population, and the volunteer-run Giving and Learning Program, which provides tutoring and other needs to refugees.

I mistakenly thought that sanction of the school hierarchy would make potential participants more likely to grant interviews. When informed of the scope and intent of my study in May 2005, one principal warned me of a lack of trust exhibited by individuals of the Roma Bosnian culture. He said that there was a universal fear exhibited by parents of talking to anyone representing an official position. The fear was that someone, such as people in social services, would try to take their children from them. The preservation of family unity made potential participants reticent to speak to outsiders.



The principal's caution proved to be true. During a five-month time span I was granted interview access to only one potential participant through the use of an interpreter sanctioned by the school district, and had completed half the interview process with that participant. Requests for a second interview were denied. The mother said she would continue the interview in the presence of her husband. My interpreter contacted the father on my behalf several times. Further interview access was not granted. Though the mother was willing to continue, her husband refused. For a more detailed account of "Difficulty Accessing Refugee Populations" refer to Appendix D. What I know now is that "Bosnian[s] . . . typically act in ways that preserve the positive image of the family's identity, especially males, who see openly revealing vulnerability or suffering as a sign of great personal weakness" (Snyder, May, Zulcic, & Gabbard, 2005, pp. 620-621).

My interpreter and I had run out of time. She accepted a new job with a high level of responsibility. She did not have the time to support my research. Other interpreters were not available. In consultation with my advisor, I decided to narrow my focus to one rather than three ethnic populations and to change my method of access to the population.

My inability to access these participants reflected Seidman's (1998) insight which stressed the importance of establishing access to participants through peers rather than through a social hierarchy of individuals above or below. I then turned my attention to potential participants of the Sudanese refugee community, as this was the second largest refugee population in the community. After being unable to develop a working relationship with participants through an interpreter, I followed Seidman's directive by accessing the community from within. I began a journey into qualitative research using

an ethnographic approach that will be addressed in detail in Chapter II of this dissertation.

This roadblock caused me to grow in unanticipated ways. I eventually developed a mind set that did give me access at a peer level. I eventually overcame the trepidation of entering unfamiliar cultural and ethnic settings, just as my subjects once had to do. I also started paying attention to life happenings and making personal connections which turned out to be the strength of participant access.

### Purpose and Design of This Revised Study

The purpose of this revised study was to more fully understand the language and literacy goals and values of a linguistically diverse Sudanese refugee population residing in the Upper Midwest. Five parents of children ranging in age from five through eight were interviewed. All parents were members of the Sudanese refugee population. Two participants were native to the Dinka tribe, one was native to the Bari tribe, and two belonged to the Moru tribe. The research question guiding my study was *What values or goals do parents of linguistically diverse Sudanese refugee learners have regarding language and literacy acquisition of their native and newly-acquired languages?* An ethnographic approach was employed in order to access the population for potential participants. I attended five church services conducted by the Sudanese community held in two separate churches over a five-month period and provided weekly volunteer tutoring services for five months in the home of one participant in order to gain access to participants. This had the ethnographic advantage of my participating in and learning much more about the culture and community of the Sudanese. Data were collected through qualitative methods including field notes regarding participant and setting

observations, formal interviews, written data collecting, and recorded data collecting when permission was granted to use a tape recorder. Research process specifics are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II. Issues related to limited English proficiency, goals parents held for their children, and languages and literacies use in home settings surfaced during this study.

### Limitations

1. The researcher's ethnic and cultural background differed from those of the participants.
2. The researcher did not speak Dinka, Bari, Moru, or colloquial Arabic at the time of this study.
3. Participants who spoke several languages before learning to speak English were often hard to understand.
4. The researcher is hearing disabled with a complete hearing loss in the right ear.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter I of this study provides the reader with an overview of the study's purpose and conditions that led to the topic selection plus a summary of a pilot study conducted by the researcher. Chapter I ends penultimately with the purpose, design, and limitations that affected the study for this dissertation. Organization of the study conducted in its final format is found at the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter II describes the methodology used for this study. An interview process employed in data collecting allowed a theory *grounded* in data to develop. An emerging design took shape which let the theory and framework evolve from the data. Access to



participants of ethnicities and cultures diverse from my own made an ethnographic approach essential to the study's progress. Data collection procedures were described along with techniques used in analysis. The triangulation of data through reviewed study of interview transcripts, observations, and professional literature precedes reference to the study's coding process found in Appendix F. The chapter ends with a summary.

Chapter III presents the participants' stories in a narrative manner that depicts the language and literacy acquisition values and goals they held for their children. Early in the chapter is a description of the conditions in Sudan that caused participants to flee their country. The description is followed by interview data acquired from the five participants. The chapter ends with a summary presented in paragraph and chart formats.

Chapter IV identifies data collected, sorted, and coded. Consistent data were categorized to develop patterns or themes. The results of coding that led to the development of themes and assertions were presented in graphic map and text formats. The thematic map delineating common threads and assertions found in this study is located in Appendix G. Themes identified are discussed with reference to the professional literature.

The dissertation culminates in Chapter V with a summary, conclusions, and recommendations. Recommendations for further research include suggestions to be used in school settings, for teacher education, for the teachers themselves, and for the researcher.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a rationale for the study and for choosing qualitative research with a grounded theory design. Justification for using the interview process as a vehicle to collect data is provided as well as the necessity of adding an ethnographic component to access potential participants. The chapter also includes information about the general health and social issues of the Sudanese people. Next, follows information describing Prairieville School District, where four out of five participants sent their children to school. The fifth participant lives in a border city in the same metropolitan area. Procedures employed to negotiate entry into the Sudanese community, as well as the validity and reliability of the study are set forth. Finally, the process of coding the raw data is addressed before ending with a chapter summary.

#### Rationale for This Study

As an elementary teacher near retirement, I began to see cultural and linguistic diversity in my classroom settings and those of my colleagues that had not occurred earlier in my career. Students with multilinguistic home environments that sometimes did not include use of the English language brought new challenges for educators dedicated to meeting student needs. In-service and pre-service teachers predominantly of a mainstream culture themselves were unprepared to teach elementary-aged students diverse from the mainstream culture. Teachers and administrators would benefit from a

study focusing on language and literacy learning in the homes of such learners. The school district in Prairieville had not conducted any formal research addressing what values and goals parents of linguistically diversity held for their children. Valuable feedback which identified the use of home languages and literacies in addition to parental educational goals for their children would help teachers understand the language background and skills these students brought into the classroom setting. Information regarding parents' perceptions on how well such goals were being met in the school setting would benefit teachers and administrators who plan curriculum and instructional strategies to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners in their schools. As Edwards, Pleasants, and Franklin (1999) state,

Even though researchers believe that parents are true experts and ought to be enlisted in effort to identify and share their child's literacy history, little research has investigated home literacy environments from the parents' stance. Few studies have been conducted which allow parents to tell their "own stories," and as a result, teachers have not perceived this information as relevant to their literacy teaching practices. (p. 14)

#### Rationale for Choosing the Qualitative Research Method

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study because its design malleability lent itself toward theory building. Qualitative research design using the interview process to gather data matches my professional and personal approach to learning. I have an insatiable curiosity toward life and learning combined with a genuine interest in people of all ages, stages, cultures, and ethnicities. My skills as a professional educator in elementary and higher education made me uniquely suited to the task of

qualitative research and the interview process. My rapport with students and parents had always been among my strongest attributes as an elementary educator. The sincere care and interest in helping others learn was always paramount in my life. The challenge to use those qualities to establish rapport with individuals outside my cultural framework in order to establish trust was one I was willing to face.

In their handbook of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) give the following definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) definition of qualitative research resonated with my professional and personal approach to information gathering. In this study, which developed into an ethnographic approach in order to access participants, I located myself within the world of the Sudanese community in home, school, and social settings. I gathered representations of participant beliefs and practices through observations, church programs and song sheets, field notes following church services I attended, and through conversations held in social settings after church services. Participant beliefs were collected mainly through field notes taken during interviews which occurred in home,



school, or office settings. Interview field notes were voice recorded when permission was granted and transcribed immediately after the interview in order to recall tone of voice and physical demeanor perceived in the participants' body language.

A rationale for this study was also supported by Sherman and Webb (1988), who described qualitative research as a method that solicits meaning from participants; it evolves from participant perspectives and contextual conditions, allowing those who are studied to speak for themselves. I liked the idea of arriving at a truth about another group by using narrative, because

telling stories . . . is . . . a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. . . . It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. . . . Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness. (Edwards et al., 1999, p. 13)

My longstanding ability to establish trust with students and parents worked in my favor as the study progressed. The element of trust in the words of Glesne (1999) could “motivate participants to tell you what otherwise they might not” (p. 43). When participants responded to interview questions, they provided data that allowed a theory *grounded* in data to evolve. Thus, a grounded theory framework of a qualitative research design allowed me to enter the study without a preconceived theory and hypothesis.

Three types of grounded theory designs practiced by qualitative researchers were reviewed to determine the best fit for this study. The systematic design, widely used in educational research, is associated with the detailed, rigorous coding used in data analysis



that Strauss and Corbin identified in 1990. The emerging design identified by Glaser (1992) eschewed preconceived coding as found in a systematic design in favor of letting the theory and framework emerge from the data. Charmaz (2000) articulated the *constructivist* method which acknowledged the values, experiences, and priorities brought to the study as part of the process of data analysis without use of diagrams or figures to summarize the process. Of these various approaches I chose to use the emerging design. My rationale for choosing an emerging design identified by Glaser over the systematic and constructivist designs is delineated in the following paragraph.

Before embarking on research for this dissertation, I conducted research projects using the emerging design of grounded theory to address requirements in three graduate courses: Advanced Qualitative Research Methods, Teacher Education, and Adult Learners. My comfort level from repeated use of the emerging design of grounded theory undeniably influenced my choice and rationale for this dissertation. The systematic design of grounded theory seemed too rigid to suit my needs. I wanted the participants to have an active voice in theory generation rather than having to fit their words into preconceived categories. The constructivist design of grounded theory appealed to me because of my keen interest in the “subjective meanings ascribed by participants in a study; the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals” (Creswell, 2002, p. 446). However, I did not choose the constructivist design for this study because it does not include the development of a summary map or diagram. I find the development of a summary map to be highly beneficial in the process of data consolidation, facilitation of data analysis, simplification of the writing process, and presentation of the study’s results to interested parties in a concise format.

## Rationale for Ethnographic Approach in Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2002), “ethnographic designs are qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (p. 481). The question I sought to answer in this study is as follows: *What values or goals do parents of linguistically diverse Sudanese refugee learners have regarding language and literacy acquisition of their native and newly-acquired languages?* The nature of inquiry in this study addressed three components of ethnographic design as described by Creswell: the shared patterns of behavior regarding the languages and literacies used in the home, school, and social settings of young children of Sudanese ethnicity; the beliefs or goals held by parents of young children of Sudanese ethnicity; and parent recollections of language use on the part of their young children that developed over time.

The design framework originally chosen for conducting this study could easily have been ethnographic rather than grounded theory. I did not originally choose an ethnographic design because of the lengthy time element involved with such a study and because I had not considered positioning myself within communities of ethnicities and cultures different from my own. Two conditions strong enough to provide a rationale caused me to add an ethnographic component to this study in July 2005: a need to access participants, and a changed mind set that allowed me to prepare mentally, emotionally, and socially for such an undertaking.

## Background on Sudanese Refugees

While some political refugees are from the northern region of Sudan, all the Sudanese refugees in this study come from the south. An agrarian economy prevails, but



the Sudanese are extremely economically challenged. While most of the country is Muslim, there are Christians in Sudan and their numbers are disproportionately high in the refugee population (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). The life expectancy for men is 56; for women, 58. Infant mortality is high at 67%. Health care is spotty, since the ratio of doctors to people is 1:11,300. The literacy rate among adults is 46%; the language of the schools is Arabic (*Country Packets: Sudan*, n.d.). “The total number of displaced persons in Sudan represents 25% of the world’s internally displaced persons, putting Sudan at the top of the list of countries containing a displaced population” (Assal, 2004, pp. 14-15).

#### Background of the Prairieville School District

Once Sudanese refugees arrive in Prairieville, they discover a fine school district to provide educational services to their children. The Prairieville School District serves a total of 11,000 students (figures are rounded off):

Elementary 6,000 pupils	Middle 1,700 pupils	High School 3,400 pupils
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There are 513 teachers and 35 administrators in the system. The teachers themselves are well educated, with 44% holding master’s degrees or higher. Class sizes are relatively small, with the average student-teacher classroom ratio being 21.6 students per teacher. Attendance figures are broken down by groups, and LEP students in grades four and eight come to school 93% of the time, as compared with all students in these grades, whose attendance rate is 95%. There are special programs for ELL students at all levels of education. The average ACT score in the district is 23 (Fargo Public Schools, 2007).

## Breakthrough to Participant Access

Working with the ELL coordinator of Prairieville, I obtained a list of interpreters. The coordinator recommended strong candidates. As has been previously stated in Chapter I, I experienced numerous setbacks when trying to access the Roma Bosnian refugee culture using my extensive network contacts. (See Appendix D for a discussion of these difficulties.) I asked a candidate name Joseph to serve as interpreter. After Joseph missed a first meeting, we rescheduled. I took four items to the breakfast meeting: my proposal abstract, the letter of consent, the interview questions, and my field notebook. All items except the field notebook are located in the appendices of this dissertation. During the breakfast meeting I informed Joseph of my research project in detail. Joseph leaned back in apparent frustration of having too much to do to be able to help me. He said he only interpreted for people of the Sudanese community who needed help. When he interpreted for the Prairieville School District he did not have time to fill out the necessary paperwork to attain compensation for his work. I would have offered to pay Joseph personally, but it was apparent that he truly did not have the time in his hectic schedule to provide the kind of support I needed to make participant contact with non-English speaking Sudanese.

The next item I shared with Joseph was a small binder I carried with me to take field notes. In it were the handwritten names and phone numbers of individuals of the Sudanese community located in Prairieville who used the volunteer mentoring services and support provided by the Giving and Learning Program. These names had been made available to me by the Giving and Learning Program coordinator who was informed of my research in a personal meeting at her workplace. I had approached the coordinator



during networking attempts to gain participant access. She knew Joseph and had worked with him to provide services for Sudanese newcomers. She commented in surprise that Joseph's missed meeting was highly unusual for him.

Joseph truly led me to the ethnographic component of this study. He helped advance my research when he identified Sudanese parents who spoke English sufficiently to answer the interview questions without aid of an interpreter. Joseph further identified English-speaking Sudanese parents of children within the age range described in my study. He turned me toward a path of ethnographic practice by telling me to "Go where the people are" (J. Kebok, personal communication, August 5, 2005).

Joseph directed me to functions held by members of the Sudanese community who lived in Prairieville. An upcoming community function was a memorial service to be held on Sunday, August 7, 2005. The service was in memory of Dr. John Garang, former Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) leader and newly elected vice president of Sudan who had recently died in a plane crash. A serendipitous contact at my health club the morning of August 6 helped me prepare for entry into the ethnographic component used in my study.

I had been acquainted with my health club friend, a teacher, for a number of years. She worked for the Prairieville School District. I had not met her in a work capacity because she taught ELL to high school students and I taught elementary-aged students. She had participated in many functions held by the Sudanese population in Prairieville and allayed my concerns regarding appropriate dress or actions at the church service. I learned that the memorial service would be a heavily attended family function. People would be well dressed but not necessarily in black. Though a time would be set

for the service to begin, it might not start at the announced time. The community might be curious about me and my reason for attending, but would wait for me to provide information. Ethnic food would be served after such an important service. I could choose to stay during social time following the service and would be welcome to partake in the foods provided.

I drove up to the large Episcopal Church twenty minutes prior to the time of the memorial service. I walked into the church entry and saw a tall, slender young man whom I had seen working at one of Prairieville's grocery stores. He said, "You're not here for Dr. Garang . . ."; I replied that I was indeed there for Dr. Garang's memorial service. The young man immediately smiled and said, "Oh, you are!" He grabbed a program and led me to the front pew beside an unidentified member of the Sudanese community. I sat in the second pew thinking that the first might be saved for family or close friends. People started to trickle in about the time the service was supposed to start. At first the musicians came in and set up their instruments. I compare the coming together of the Sudanese community to a gentle wave. There was no rush, though the service should have already started. Musicians were trying their instruments and sound systems. Some were tapping their drums. The entire atmosphere was gentle and relaxing. The service began when the church had filled with congregants a half hour or more after the designated start time.

A memorial custom of the Sudanese people is to have one service soon after the person's passing and another more formal service about six weeks later. I also attended the formal service in memory of Dr. John Garang on September 24, 2005. A representative of Senator Kent Conrad was present. She was asked to speak on behalf of

the senator. The service involved pastors from several parishes who originated from different tribes of south Sudan. Words from the pastors and people of import were often interpreted from English to Arabic or from Arabic or tribal languages into English. Dress was much more formal and colorful than during the initial memorial service. Several women wore headdresses that matched their attire. My friend told me that many women make new clothing for a momentous occasion such as a memorial service for a noted dignitary. Many men wore suits and ties.

Music at both memorial services was lively and impassioned with rhythmic beats. During each service I sat near the front of the church near the musical group. I was fascinated to watch two musicians share keyboard playing. They would make eye contact before changing positions, one musician taking over for the other without missing a beat. They did this several times as one keyboard musician moved to the percussion area to play the drums. A good deal of body language accompanied the vocalists' singing as well as congregation, who pointed up to Jesus during songs. Hymns were in several languages.

Speakers talked of their loss of a great leader. Dr. Garang was college educated in the United States. His thesis on water management had been implemented as a model for water management in Sudan. As the civil war continued in his homeland, Dr. Garang returned to his country as an eventual leader of the south Sudan resistance to the Arab Muslim government of north Sudan. The death of Dr. Garang was a great loss to the Sudanese people. Congregants at the service mourned and honored him but talked of the unity and the strength of the people of south Sudan. Speakers gave hope to the community by telling them that all was not lost with Dr. Garang's death. The work he



started will be taken up once again as a new leader emerges from the people of south Sudan. During the sharing of food and social connectedness, videos and slide shows of Dr. Garang were flashed on the white walls of the community room. The Sudanese community wanted their children to know of Dr. Garang and of what he did to help the people of south Sudan.

The strength in survival of the Lost Boys of Sudan was recognized. The Lost Boys are those who remained alive after walking hundreds of miles through sub-Saharan heat and wilderness when they were forced by violence from their southern Sudan villages. About 10,000 survived of the original 26,000. The boys formed their own family groups; older boys helped the younger ones. After spending years in refugee camps, 3,600 Lost Boys were resettled in the United States (Kriner, 2001). Some of the Lost Boys are now part of the community of Prairieville.

The Lost Boys, who were members of the community and are now men, were asked to stand as they were honored. While standing they were asked to sing their song of strength and unity, which they did. Though I could not understand the words, I could feel the intensity among those singing and the congregants listening. I was told by one of my participants that the song has great meaning to the community.

This formal and final church memorial for Dr. Garang was a full religious service that lasted more than an hour and a half and was followed by ethnic foods served in enormous proportions. I joined Teresa, a woman I had been tutoring, in the sharing of food and fellowship. By September 2005 I was feeling comfortable within the Sudanese community and knew and was recognized by several people with whom I could converse. Entering the gathering spaces of individuals of a culture and ethnicity other than my own



was not something I had attempted before this point in time. By joining the Sudanese community at church and social settings, I began not only to gain access to participants who recalled seeing me at services, I also came to the realization of what it must feel like to be one of few among a community of many. At first I felt self-conscious, but ever the adventurer, I stood, sang, and ate with community members. I sang, not understanding the meaning of the words I uttered. By doing so I would be able to add depth to my study through a rich description of a culture and through the analysis of shared patterns of behavior in settings natural to the cultural group. The incorporation of an ethnographic component was a natural development in the design of this study. It was a move not taken without some trepidation. To step outside one's comfort level, to move away from what is commonly known and understood, to put myself in the position of becoming a minority myself, helped me grow. I began to develop cultural competence as described by Segal and Mayadas (2005). Cultural competence is composed of four elements: Cultural Awareness (of one's own culture and biases), Knowledge Acquisition (learning about other cultures and their strengths), Skill Development (gaining the ability to interact cross-culturally), and Inductive Learning (taking one's understandings to then educate others).

As with other types of qualitative research designs, ethnographies are categorized with their own set of terms and descriptors. Creswell (2002) identifies microethnography, the specific type of ethnographic design used in this research, as "a study focused on a specific aspect of a cultural group and setting" (p. 483). The Sudanese community I wished to enter had all of Creswell's components of a culture sharing group: two or more individuals, interacting on a regular basis, having interacted

for some time, representative of a larger group, and the adoption of some shared patterns of behaving, thinking, or talking.

### Negotiating Entry Through Ethnographic Settings and Procedures Employed to Conduct the Study

I collected data used in the ethnographic portion of this study from July 2005 to January 2006. By attending three memorial and two Sunday church services I came to appreciate the cultural and linguistic richness of the Sudanese population that resided in Prairieville.

Less than a week after attending the first memorial service for Dr. John Garang, I made phone contact with Jacob. He was a member of the Sudanese community who was recommended by the aforementioned Prairieville ELL teacher. Following the advice on *building conversational guidelines* presented by Rubin and Rubin (1995), I identified my teacher friend as my contact who suggested I call. Jacob, a father of seven, listened intently to what I had to say about my study and what I wanted from him as a parent of an eight year old.

When I contacted Jacob, he responded by agreeing to grant a one hour interview to me, in spite of his busy schedule. Jacob asked for and received from me by E-mail the proposal abstract, consent form, and questions I planned to ask during the interview. All items listed are located in the appendices at the end of this dissertation. As part of my recordkeeping I retained all E-mails exchanged with participants throughout the study. The interview began with a review of the consent form, which Jacob had previously read and understood. He signed and dated the form before giving me permission to tape and voice record the interview and to take field notes. The digital voice recording was erased

after transcription was verified. The audio tape recording which matched the digital voice recording was archived in a locked and secure area at my residence separate from transcripts, field notes, and consent forms. I followed this same protocol with all data collected from participants. Jacob became an informant when he recommended William, who became the next participant. Jacob personally went to the home of his niece and her husband to speak of the study on my behalf. His niece Mary was willing to participate in the study. An informant who connected the researcher with others demonstrated the *snowballing effect* (Kagee, 1004). I then solicited permission to interview Teresa, whom I had been tutoring over a five-month period. Luke, a minister who officiated at a wedding reception and at several of the memorial services I attended, was the final participant I solicited.

I met William at the formal memorial service for Dr. John Garang. To my surprise, the moderator of the ceremony introduced me to the community. William urged me up to the podium to address the congregation. The experience, totally unanticipated, would not follow the tenets of ethnography. It is the job of the researcher to cause as little disruption to the community as possible. Standing at the podium to introduce myself was never my intent, but it seemed to be a forum used by community members and guests. At least community members would know who I was when I called.

Cultivating Teresa for participation in the study was prolonged and frustrating. Interviews were rescheduled six times before the interview finally took place. Details of the encounters are located in Chapter III. Wanting to be as economical with time as possible, I revised interview questions by cutting to shorten the number and by



simplifying vocabulary used. Next, I cut and taped interview questions on a writing tablet so her interview would move along more quickly.

The next participant, Mary, was married to a man with a distinctive name. I happened to have seen his name and picture in the Prairieville newspaper. The article was about the loss of his relatives at the hands of Egyptian police trying to oust peaceful protesters at an Egyptian refugee camp. Jacob, Mary, and Mary's husband lost family members in the same conflict. I attended the memorial service to express my condolences to Jacob and Mary. I sent a sympathy card to Mary's husband because I did not get a chance to meet him at the memorial service.

As aforementioned, Luke, a minister who officiated at a wedding reception and at several of the memorial services I attended, was the final participant I solicited. I spoke with Luke briefly at the wedding reception regarding my research. He told me to call him after the Christmas holiday season. I did as he requested and Luke honored me by granting the final data collecting interview of this dissertation.

#### Validity and Reliability of Data

With the interview process completed, I began to check the validity and reliability of the data collected. Because access provided a challenge in time for the participants, I consolidated the three interview format designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). I condensed the three interview format into one interview with three segments.

Though the interview process had to be condensed in order to gain access, the interview data collected from all but one participant were rich and full. In terms of reliability and validity, use of the original three interview format taking place three days to a week apart would have given the participants time to think and reflect. Data

collection on three different occasions would also have allowed for idiosyncratic moods or conditions that might have influenced an individual's response on any given day.

Of necessity there are times that alternatives to the structure and process of the three interview format exist. The busy lifestyles of participants in this study forced me to seek alternatives to the original plan for the interview process. I took comfort from Seidman (1998) who wrote, "As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview structure and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored" (p. 15). In this study, five participants produced five points of view regarding language and literacy acquisition values and goals held for their young children. They had an opportunity to reconstruct and reflect on their experience within the confines of their home environments or workplaces. Zaharlick (1992) notes that

ethnography is a dynamic, interactive-reactive approach that allows the ethnographer to explore and refine the questions that were posed at the beginning of the study and generate questions that could not be anticipated before entry into the field . . . [these] modifications are a response to local conditions, . . . or to problems of gaining access to needed information, persons, or events. (p. 120)

#### Triangulation, Reliability, Validity, and Coding

Triangulation as used in qualitative research is a systematic method by which the data collected can be analyzed through various lenses to check for validation. The researcher uses multiple data collections, methods, and sources. In the present study I used observations of settings, participant interviews, field notes, printed material used by

the culture, and sources from the professional literature to establish validity for triangulation.

To establish reliability I began with expository interview questions seeking facts and opinions from my participants. Throughout the interview I often paraphrased the query a second time using different words to check participant reliability. In addition the responses from participants usually took a narrative form. These discourses frequently were elaborative and meandering, telling me much more than I had asked. Interestingly, the participants through the telling of their stories anticipated many of the interview questions before they were asked. This provided me with another opportunity to check reliability.

I designed coding procedures based on the work of such experts as Rubin and Rubin (1995), Seidman (1998), and Glesne (1999). The coding procedures helped me to manage the data so that connecting threads or themes could be developed and commonalities and elements of dissonance could be identified. The coding procedures were a vital component that gave direction, shape and significance to the participants' stories. Coding and analysis procedures used in a step-by-step format in the study are enumerated in Appendix F. Themes and assertions generated as a result of coding are in thematic map format found in Appendix G.

### Summary

This qualitative research study of Sudanese refugee parents' attitudes toward language and literacy was conducted using an emerging approach to grounded theory design (Glaser, 1992; Glesne, 1999). The chapter provides information about the general health and social issues of the Sudanese and is followed by a description of the



Prairieville School District where four out of five participants send their children to school. The fifth participant lived in a border city in the same metropolitan area. Using ethnographic methods to access potential participants, I conducted interviews, did observations, made field notes, and consulted the professional literature to verify my findings through triangulation. These methods provided data that were subjected to detailed coding procedures for sorting and analysis which may be found in Appendix F. The coding and analysis led to the development of a thematic map and assertions which may be found in Appendix G. The map and assertions helped organize themes and were used as a guide to write this dissertation. Chapter III comprises the interview narratives in which participants speak for themselves.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERVIEW NARRATIVES

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the language and literacy goals and values of a Sudanese refugee population residing in the Upper Midwest. Chapter III begins by describing the conditions in Sudan that caused participants to flee their country. This political upheaval had a grave effect on the individuals who participated in the study. Following this I describe the settings where interviews took place and the five participants who are parents of children ranging in age five through eight. The midwestern city located in the Upper Midwest of the United States as well as participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Following each description, the participant's story is told individually.

#### Sudan: Background Information

Sudanese refugees might be considered an extreme group in terms of pre-migration traumas, many having lived through extreme hardships on the way to resettlement in another country. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, is bounded to the north by Egypt, northeast by the Red Sea, east by Eritrea and Ethiopia, south by Kenya, Uganda, and Zaire, west by the Central African Republic and Chad, and northwest by Libya. A map of Sudan can be found in Appendix H.

Sudan has been in civil war nearly continuously since independence from Britain in 1956. The civil war has been between the predominantly Islamic, Arabic north

and a diversity of African ethnic groups in the south, mainly Christian or Animist. Sudan is among the poorest countries in the world. (Schweitzer et al., 2006, p. 180)

When southern soldiers were ordered to join the government troops of north Sudan, they mutinied rather than follow orders transferring them to the north. Colonel John Garang of south Sudan encouraged mutinies in his and other garrisons. He united the troops of south Sudan to form the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1983.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s an escalation in conflict, drought and the imposition of strict Islamic law and Arabic as the official language led to an increase in refugee movement. In 1993, it was estimated that nearly half a million Sudanese found refuge in other countries excluding the 1.3 million estimated to have died in the flight. (Schweitzer et al., 2006, p. 180)

The key issues which caused so many south Sudanese to flee their country include starvation, slavery, raping, and killing. Villages were burnt, family life was disrupted, and education became unavailable to children. Slavery became rampant.

The large Arab militia assisting government soldiers come from various Arab tribal peoples called the Janjaweed, which means "warriors on horseback." . . . Kartoum's Janjaweed militia has become more active in the war and is now responsible for the majority of killings, village burnings, rapes, and massive destruction of foodstocks, seeds, agricultural implements, livestock, and critical wells and irrigation systems. (Reeves, n.d., paras. 4, 6)



To complicate matters even further, the Chevron Company discovered oil in south Sudan. As a result the government abolished agreements with South Sudan in order to attain oil rights and revenue through government control.

The Civil War ended on November 19, 2004, with the signing of a peace agreement. Al-Abashir was sworn in as President and former rebel leader John Garang was sworn in as First Vice President on July 5, 2005. The new constitution declared Sudan to be a “democratic, decentralized, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual State” (Bureau of African Affairs, 2006). John Garang was killed in a helicopter crash on July 30, 2005. Salva Kir, Garang’s deputy, was selected by the Members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement to take the position of Vice President.

Serious problems continue to exist in Sudan in the present moment. On March 12, 2007, the UN said that the Sudanese government had perpetrated human rights crimes against its own people in Darfur. Offenses include mass rape, abduction, and forcing people from their homes. The Sudanese Arab militia known as the Janjaweed have been accused of attacking villagers in Darfur, killing inhabitants and forcing others to flee, while the government provides air support. At the same time, the government denies the allegation, and accuses the West of exaggerating the problems in Darfur (“Report Condemns Sudan,” 2007).

#### General Background of Participants

As I continued to read the professional literature, my understanding of the concept of cultural identity began to change. It not only includes language and country but also includes socioeconomic status, length of residence in the U.S., where one resides (in this

case, in an urban setting), the reason for the immigration, age, gender, level of education, and resources or support systems (Hanson, 2004). Most of the following information in this section is based on observation notes I took as the study progressed. Participants in the study ranged in age from 27 to 48, and their children ranged from five to eight years old. The general health of the participants varied. One participant coughed periodically throughout the interview. He implied that he had been quite ill at one time. One participant was disabled having suffered the loss of an arm. One participant was thin, but appeared healthy. The remaining two participants were in robust health.

Only two interviews took place in home settings that were located in apartment buildings. Both homes were clean and orderly. Furniture was protected; for example, dining room tables in both homes had tablecloths with decorative embroidery protected by plastic. Living room furniture was also protected by use of embroidered doilies.

All participants were Christians, and the church was the center of their faith and social lives. Gatherings at church involved more than Sunday services. Participants celebrated life and death together on the occasions I attended services. Participants read and sang hymns from printed program booklets written in English and Arabic. Participants who knew Swahili read and sang hymns in that language, as well. Sermons and homilies were orally translated from English to Arabic. All male participants had Bibles in their homes. One participant had home Bibles in Dinka, Arabic, and English, one had Bibles in Bari and English, and one had a Moru Bible.

Authentic Sudanese food was prepared in large quantities for important occasions such as memorial services or visits from high-ranking clergy. The sharing of food made

for a family-like atmosphere among the community. Gatherings were times for strong social connectedness among community members.

Participants showed respect and honor for social gatherings by wearing formal attire. Men wore suits or colorful native shirts; some women wore beautifully handcrafted long dresses and headdresses. Children were well groomed and well behaved at the major church gatherings I attended.

From my observations and reading I concluded that the Sudanese community was close-knit, mutually supportive, and united through their faith which continued to sustain them in their new lives in America. The family is the focal point of their culture. To a person, the Sudanese people I met highly valued education and were working hard to support their children's achievement in language and literacy.

#### Participant I: Jacob

I first met Jacob at an alternative high school where he taught English as a Second Language (ESL). Jacob's willingness to share meant a sacrifice of time from his very busy schedule. That schedule included teaching ESL, writing his capstone paper for a Ph.D. at a local university, and serving as husband and father to a wife and seven children. In addition to the interview setting, I observed Jacob in church settings on two occasions. The first observation took place during the first of three local memorial services I attended. Elders of the church spoke to the people in English and Arabic to give them counsel at their time of sorrow. Hymns were sung in both languages.

The second observation of Jacob in a church setting took place after a memorial service for relatives and friends killed during a peaceful protest at a refugee camp for



Sudanese located in Cairo, Egypt. Once again I observed multiple language use during singing, speaking, and reading.

Jacob, a member of the Moru Tribe in Sudan, arrived in Prairieville with his family on December 10, 1999. The average temperature of 11.6 degrees Fahrenheit in the month of December in far north mid-continent Prairieville made a cold welcome for a family that hailed from tropical Sudan. However, this family that suffered political upheaval resulting from practices of genocide could finally experience the safety offered in the United States. Jacob had one son, David, age eight, at the time of the interview, as well as six older daughters.

Jacob arrived as an educated man in possession of a Bachelor of Education degree in English literature attained with a scholarship granted by the government of Egypt. While in Sudan he taught the equivalent of junior high and two years of secondary school. The scholarship offering was made as Egypt's contribution to southern Sudan after the first peace agreement of the war was signed in 1972. As a poet and vocalist in his native language, Jacob valued his education and used his writing ability as a medium to express his inner feelings.

Jacob's education was not easily attained. During his early years in southern Sudan, Jacob began his initial experience in formal education as a first grader at the age of twelve. Education in southern Sudan was arduous because schools were located far from his home community.

Actually I had to truck fifty miles in order to look for schools. And for myself because I lost both of my parents when I was still a young boy and there was nobody to take care of me in order to send me to school. So that delayed my

education. . . . When I went to school I studied to learn my own vernacular language. Our system is, first of all, when you go to school you have to learn your own language. For two years. And, they teach you how to read, how to write. And that is a very good affirmation for . . . for a child to learn. Because you know how to write and . . . you know how to read in your own language. So, in third year, I studied to learn English. I studied to learn English and we were given the Oxford, Oxford Reader . . . of Africa. I think it was very, very good and I really didn't have much time in order to learn English. It was good, but when we went to high school, Arabic was introduced . . . and things became quite different for us because of the confusion caused by, by the new political behavior. They put more emphasis on Arabic instead of English. You see . . . because my language . . . the African language . . . they drop it in the second year and from there you cannot not have really any . . . anything to be done with your own language. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Jacob tried to pursue a master's degree while living in Sudan, but government support was no longer available, and he was unable to pay tuition costs. Jacob attained an M.Ed. in the U.S. at Prairieville University through tuition waivers which supported cultural diversity and was pursuing a doctoral degree at Prairieville at the time of the interview. Jacob highly values the American school system.

. . . I applied for a loan and I got a tuition waiver from cultural diversity. That gave me a chance. It is a very, very good American system. It encourages education to everybody. It is very strong in our own system here. When you want to go to school [in Sudan] . . . the parents had to select you to go to school.

And others not even have a chance to go to school, which is not really good, but here it is must! (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

As much as he values his education, Jacob put his doctoral studies on hold for a year in March 2006 to serve as an advisor to the education minister in Juba, the regional capital of southern Sudan. Jacob, a U.S. citizen since November 2005, will help create an education system in an African nation besieged by poverty and razed by more than twenty years of civil war. Such is his commitment to education.

Jacob also expressed sadness about language. Because of the war in southern Sudan, his older children experienced fragmented language development. As the family was displaced from one nation to another,

they [his children] lost their own education. When we left from Sudan we went to Egypt, then to Libya. And there they were taught Arabic. And they really didn't master that Arabic because we have to leave Libya and come to . . . to Egypt to struggle for . . . a settlement. So all the time we were floating, floating, floating and they didn't really got any chance. They didn't get any chance of a . . . consistency in order to go to . . . to schools. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Was it important for Jacob's children to learn to speak and maintain his native language?

I think it is very important for my children to maintain our native language. Not because we are against any language, but because your own language is an important weapon to you. If I know . . . my enemy's language [Arabic] . . . added to my own language, I'll be able to defend myself . . . protect myself. What . . .



what happened . . . I want to tell you a story. There was in 1965 when . . . southern Sudan . . . was at war with the North. In July 1965 there was general shooting in southern Sudan in the big town of Juba, which is the capital city of southern Sudan, whereby many, many, many people . . . people were killed. Some people in the families . . . in one family *all* killed at a go. Now, those who . . . those who were by then in Juba, the . . . the government soldiers entered and particularly in the industrial areas and started to shoot everybody . . . anybody they found. So my uncle was at work and . . . his wife and other children were in the house and they were surrounded. They were surrounded by government soldiers. But it was very, very lucky that when he was coming . . . his wife saw him coming . . . saw him coming . . . and he was on the side where there were no soldiers. So when the husband was about to enter . . . then she spoke to her husband . . . in our own language and . . . my uncle escaped. And other children . . . who knew our language also escaped. But other children who didn't know . . . understand our own language, they remained in the house and the soldiers came and killed them with the mother . . . too, there. She was pregnant . . . she was pregnant and there were three . . . three children who didn't understand our own language. They were all killed. My uncle happened to survive with the other children who knew their own language. Language is very important . . . very, very, very important because you can defend yourself. You can protect yourself from . . . you see. So let us not really deprive our children from speaking our own language because know some things here . . . how bad it is. It is not bad. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Two languages were used in the Ajmenja home during the child David's pre-school years. The Moru tribal language was used as he communicated with his mother, and Arabic was used with his siblings. English was not acquired until David met the language formally in the school setting.

Having learned English in the school setting, David now speaks three languages. Much to Jacob's disappointment, colloquial Arabic is the preferred family language. It is the language most comfortable for his older children. In spite of having a fragmented education due to the outbreak of war in Sudan, Arabic was the prevalent language that united all Sudanese. Denied the opportunity to learn a native language, Arabic, the language of the enemy, was used by mandate throughout the country. David speaks English in the school setting, and Arabic in the home and Sudanese community settings. Communication in Moru, his family's tribal language, is no longer as prevalent as it once was when David was a preschooler.

Jacob viewed the home setting as the child's first learning environment as he described his own parental goals for his child. "I would encourage him to . . . to speak our language. He should at least learn to speak. By speaking our own language, it means that he's maintaining our own culture. Maintaining our own culture is very, very important to me" (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 2005).

Jacob also valued learning English because it is an international language. Competency in the English language will help David pursue his own future goals.

Since colloquial Arabic was spoken in the home I asked if Arabic reading material was also available. Jacob became quite animated in his reply.

No! [spoken emphatically]. We don't have Arabic. We want to have English. We don't like it. You know, because . . . some people, they take Arabic language as a language of enemy, and they *hate* it. You see? They *hate* it! So we don't have, ah, any Arabic book in our own house. We don't have it. We only have English books and we have some of our language. That is to say, we don't, of course we lost some of the materials that we had . . . because of the war. But we have – what we have is the Bibles. We have the Bible and the prayer books, and the hymnal books in our own language. There are . . . there are . . . there are also Bible, ah . . . Bibles reading Arabic, but none of us is doing that. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Prior to starting his master degree work, Jacob had time to support David's learning. Jacob spoke expressively as he told of reading with David on a nightly basis. Jacob monitored his reading and supervised his school work. He watched as David improved rapidly. In Jacob's words, "He really . . . he went very fast and teachers were surprised. *Really, what is going on with you, man?* It was, of course, I was helping him" (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005).

Jacob felt positive about the educational benefits afforded his son in America because he will be given the opportunity to pursue his own career. David has told his father at his very young age that he would like to become a doctor. At the time of the interview, Jacob felt that David was doing well in school, but struggling with written literacy. Working on his Ph.D. and teaching ESL left Jacob without the necessary private time needed to be an educational support to his family members. He felt saddened at this reality.



Jacob feels strongly that the midwestern community he's living in is his community now. He's here to stay. Though he's left his wife and seven children and his doctoral work for one year to lend his professional educational expertise to the people of southern Sudan, he fully plans to return to the United States and his home in the midwestern community that gave him and his children a free education.

#### Participant II: William

I met William just outside the enclosed university library entry leisurely smoking a cigarette with his right hand. His left limb was missing from just below his shoulder and he was wearing a prosthetic arm. I went outside the building to check on his identity. From a height of 6 feet and 6 or 7 inches, William answered in a deep voice, "You have found me!"

A father of four, William was a college freshman. I could not help but wonder at the loss of William's limb. An inquiry regarding his disability was not a part of the interview, and no information regarding his loss entered the conversation. In addition to the interview, I also observed William in a church setting during a memorial service. I watched as William sang, spoke, and read in English, Swahili, and Arabic.

William arrived in Prairieville in 1995 as the second family of Sudanese ethnicity of the Dinka tribe to set up residency in the area. He had three children in elementary school and one in junior high at the time of the interview. For the purpose of this dissertation William and I focused on his six year old son Samuel and eight year old daughter Martha who were in the first and third grades.

When discussing his educational background in Sudan, William observed that distance to schools was a problem.

Ah, it's kind of backwards. Not like the education here. When we come to school it's like when you know your bus is here . . . comes for children to school and then bring them back. That how it is, but we don't have buses. So those who are very far from school are put in a boarding school. So, that would be your first exposure to Arabic and Arab people even because you just come from rural areas. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

William learned many languages in school. Before William entered school, he learned the Dinka language at home and Dinka literacy at church. He learned Arabic at school through grade six. All courses were taught in Arabic. Starting in grade seven William learned English as a content area subject and in grade ten French was introduced. Students had the option of taking French or World History as a content area course in grade ten.

In his home there were no books or magazines available in a language other than English. However, the family home had Bibles written in Dinka, Arabic, and English. The only literacy available in William's home was his school writing.

William valued his children's early education. He appreciated the attention given by teachers. Though his children were enrolled in Head Start and kindergarten, they were not prepared to start first grade. William was able to give his children the support they needed. In William's words,

So, when they come home, they come with their assignments. "What you got? Read for me." And then I write for them. That made me feel like I am part of community. I'm blessed and I am happy to see that. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

In the home William initially used Dinka, his tribal language. When his older children entered school, they also used Arabic for oral and written communication, but continued to speak in Dinka. At the time of the interview, English and Dinka and occasionally Arabic were the languages used in the home. William used Dinka to speak to his wife. If she did not understand the meaning, he switched to Arabic to clarify. I did not think to ask if William's wife was from a tribe other than Dinka. That may be the case since she did not always understand the Dinka language. William said his children no longer understand Arabic.

Language preference in the home setting changed after William's children went to school. "They are now fluent in English, so they communicate in English. And I have nothing to do about it." William smiled and laughed a little at his statement. He wants his children to maintain the Dinka language, but does not believe in forcing them. Though William's children are fluent in English, they do speak some Dinka among themselves when they are watching television or are playing in the basement. William and his wife continue to communicate in Dinka with occasional Arabic for clarification. The older children, however, act as though their parents are being backward when they use their tribal language. This attitude may foreshadow Segal and Mayadas (2005): "In schools, children move toward the process of 'Americanization,' which shatters the family equilibrium as the children become the 'cultural brokers'" (p. 578).

William hopes that his children will speak English fluently because that is the language they will interact with in their local community. In spite of pulling back in his use of Dinka to communicate with his children, William still holds mastery of the language as a goal for his children. William's major goal for all his children is that they



become functional and productive as citizens. He would like to have his children speak Dinka as well as English. Dinka is used in church settings that the family attend.

William spoke of the intimate pleasure of using his native language.

We, we have our own notes, our own writings. It's kind of like, when you talk it, it's kind of like the *best* when you are a group of you and you are speaking Dinka. It sounds good because some don't know good English and it would be like you are shaming them or you are showing off when you speak English. Yes.

[reflective pause]. So is for acceptance, too, we do it. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

William supports his children's education by helping with homework assignments. He also feels it is in the children's best interest to let them develop the English language naturally. Again in William's words, "What worked well I . . . I realize is to leave them alone and they speak English. And, like sometime when their mom send them something. . . . Bring that, get this. She will say it in Dinka and they will bring it."

William recognizes major differences between his home culture and that of America. He spoke with sadness in his voice as he described how his Sudanese relatives consider refugees like himself lost because he came to America.

Back there . . . the . . . the American culture is like a . . . taboo to us there because everything is open and very rapid [in America]. But there [in Sudan] that is some isolation. Like the school . . . girls different from boys. Girl is segregated. And the people wear dress uniform. You don't just put [on] what you want and those kind of differences cause interruption [to learning]. Like here a boy can hold a hand with girl and just walk normally like this and nobody's concerned. So, they

. . . they [the Sudanese] consider them like taboos in . . . in my country. Yes. And they . . . they say that this is like pagan life with non-believers. So, is not encouraged to come to America. They say you will just get lost. You will not go back. So it's like surrendering your people to another country willingly. But when we came we were careful and we tried to invest the tradition on them. And it never work anyway, but they're [his children] still there with us. They never run away. The children, when they are eighteen, they are . . . they are told to . . . to leave home in America. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

Segal and Mayadas (2005) underscore William's comments: "Among the many traumas of the emigration-immigration process is culture shock in an alien environment; language, social structures, norms, expectations, and values substantially different from those that have been elemental to the immigrants' understanding of themselves" (pp. 567-568).

William may have been questioned frequently about his missing limb in his American community because he also chose to share the following observation about differences between American and Sudanese cultures. Americans are more direct. Sudanese are more indirect. "If you have something on your face, or neck, American would say, '*What is that?*' My daughter is fourteen years old. She is growing up like an American rather than Dinka girl" (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005).

### Participant III: Teresa

Teresa shared her story with me on October 22, 2005, in her home. Teresa had five children; only one, Peter, age six, came within the age parameters of this study. Because she was still uncertain about language, Teresa had her brother Francis sit in during the interview to interpret if necessary. Besides the interview, I had the most frequent opportunities to observe Teresa. We met during a session of the Giving and Learning Program that connects volunteers with refugees for tutoring. I became Teresa's English tutor for five months. I observed her difficulty with oral English; perhaps this was a reason she was usually not very verbal. I also observed her use of English and Arabic during church and memorial services.

I found both female Sudanese participants, Teresa and Mary, to be surprisingly dignified and beautiful given the atrocities and hardships they encountered before arriving in the U.S. Teresa was fairly quiet and unresponsive during the interview, which was a change from her demeanor during tutoring sessions when just the two of us would interact. Her arms were crossed at her waist and she rocked forward and back when responding. There were times her brother Francis clarified my questions before she responded. At other times Francis responded for Teresa without checking with her first. I have identified the statements in the interview by the person giving the response.

It was difficult to pin Teresa down for specific interview times. The first interview took two weeks to set up. Previously arranged dates and times were cancelled just prior to my arrival. I would prepare my equipment and materials before making a final call to Teresa to let her know I would soon arrive at her home. She would tell me during our phone conversation that it was not a good time for her. Most frequently



Teresa cancelled at the last minute because her brother was not at her home and she wanted him present for the interview. One time when I called just prior to arrival I was told that it was not a good day because her brother was coming from Africa. I was puzzled and wondered if we had a miscommunication because of language differences. I planned to simplify the language I used in the interview to ease communication between us.

I was thoroughly prepared for the interview with this participant. One of the potential interview dates was Saturday, October 15, 2005. Knowing her five children would be at home, I wrote a book about a day in their mother's life as dictated to me during a tutoring session with Teresa so her children could illustrate the story with colored pens and mechanical crayons purchased for the occasion. I called Teresa's home at 2:30 to find out if we needed to reschedule once again. She told me to come right away. When I arrived at her home I was greeted by Francis' fiancée and Teresa's five children. Teresa was involved in an animated phone conversation in a language other than English. She sounded agitated.

I sat on a chair in the living room and was immediately surrounded by Teresa's children. I began to share Teresa's story with them. They stood in a group and read Teresa's story aloud in unison. Teresa ended her phone call and joined the group, reading orally along with her children. When the story was finished the children gathered the colored pens, crayons, and script before going to a back room to work on the project.

When the children exited the area, Teresa and Francis began a heated discussion in a language other than English. Teresa sounded frustrated and angry. Teresa was just informed that the Bishop of the Diocese was going to be at church the next day. It is a

Sudanese custom to have a meal after a church service of significance. Teresa would be required to purchase groceries and cook food for the gathering the next day. The interview would have to be rescheduled once again.

I attended the church service presided over by the Bishop the next day and sat near Teresa who was with her five children. Teresa left just before the service ended to prepare to serve the food. Teresa was dressed in a pink satin dress and headdress she had made herself. I stayed after the service to socialize with members of the congregation during the shared meal. When the crowd at the serving table dwindled, I approached Teresa and asked about her shopping and cooking. It was then that I found out she had stayed up all night because she had to do all the cooking herself. She said that everyone else was too busy. Our interview finally took place the next Saturday, October 22, 2005.

Teresa remarked that in Sudan students stay in one class rather than going from class to class for different subjects. She thought the instruction is taught the same way in both countries, but did not know what type of learning worked well for her son, Peter, who was six years old and in the first grade at the time of the interview. Teresa liked the ESL program and felt everything in Peter's American learning experience was satisfactory. Teresa said that parents work with teachers in Sudanese schools. In her words, "Teachers like second father to the child. Respect teacher" (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 22, 2005). Her brother Francis mentioned that some educated parents would serve on a parents' committee to find out school needs and activities.

It was important for Teresa to learn how to speak English. Francis said that living in the USA, English will be key for anything his sister needs. He indicated that pronunciation was difficult for Teresa to master. Teresa was thankful for my work as

teacher volunteer along with the opportunity to attend the Giving and Learning Program. This program supports language and literacy learning for area refugees. Teresa also mentioned learning English from TV. The sound of a religious program on the radio or television formed the backdrop for our interview.

Teresa used reading material in both Arabic and English; however, she did not describe any examples in her home. She wants to learn how to write in English to pass a driver's test. When asked about learning practices that worked well for her, Teresa said, "Teacher writes. I write. Teacher reading helps" (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 22, 2005).

Teresa said that Arabic and Dinka were languages used in the home prior to Peter's school entry. She used to tell him religious stories about Jesus crucified and stories about his grandfather. Arabic and Dinka continued to be primary languages used in the home after Peter started going to school. English in the home was used on an "as needed" basis. She used Dinka and Arabic to tell additional stories to Peter. Teresa's brother reads to Peter in Arabic, and he also reads in English for homework or any other need. Though Francis can write in Arabic, he does not use it much in America. All the children write in English.

It is important to Teresa that Peter learn to speak and write in English because the family lives in America where many people use English. She wants Peter to keep the Dinka tribal language because it is the family's culture. Teresa would like Peter to speak Dinka, Arabic, and English at home and English as needed in school. "School is where all cultures come together. In order to communicate, you have to use one language.



Children don't know Dinka that much. May get mixed up trying to tell another what words mean in Dinka" (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 22, 2005).

Teresa's considered her role in her child's education to be the same whether she lived in the United States or in Sudan. She attended conferences and encouraged her children to participate. She felt good about Peter because he is interested in his lessons from the teacher.

While Teresa is satisfied about school, Peter, however, does not like some of the food. Peter's friends from school come to their home to play, and Peter goes to friends' homes to play as well. The children use English when playing together. Teresa wants her son to continue having friends as well as the opportunity to be what he wants to be.

#### Participant IV: Mary

I interviewed Mary in her home setting. Mary, her husband, and two young children live in a Community Housing project. Family pictures and pictures of prominent Sudanese political leaders were prominently displayed in the Janusa home. Mary's uncle was Jacob, and she agreed to meet with me because of his recommendation. Though we had never met before the interview, Mary's smile was welcoming and we easily established a rapport. Younger than my other participants, Mary was the mother of two children: a six year old girl and a four year old boy. Outside of our interview session, I only observed Mary at one memorial service. Like the other participants, she used Arabic and English in both oral and written form.

Mary came to the United States in 1995 when she was sixteen years old. She and her sister Charity lived in California for six months before moving to Prairieville. Mary met her husband Emmanuel in Sudan, and they were married in the United States. As

indicated before, they have two young children. Like many refugees, Mary's family is fractured with members living in different countries. Her description of family members reveals the complexity of the family's relationships.

I only had one or two years of English because of war. I had to leave the country with not enough English background. It was kind of hard. All these words sound the same. I can hear what people say, but I didn't understand. I was sixteen years old. I went to high school. I didn't know much English. I graduated in 2000. I have brother and sister here. Mom is in Egypt. She's raising three grandchildren. My sister died of a fever. My mom's tribe is Moru. My dad is from Ashanti. I was six months old when he died. I have sisters, and brothers. Two sisters are here. One is my sister, and one is my half sister. I have one brother here. Some are in Egypt with Mom. There are two brothers and two sisters with Mom. Three died because of illness. One sister came to Khartoum. She had a fever. Her baby was two months old. Grandma raised her and two others . . . two boys and one girl. (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

In Sudan, all schools offer language instruction in English and Arabic. Mary had all instruction in Arabic to the sixth grade, which she likens to high school in America. Then she switched to English. Once in the U.S. Mary had difficulty understanding what words meant. She concentrated on words one by one to determine what people said. She spent time reading books and using dictionaries in English and in Arabic. Mary would welcome an offering of Arabic language learning in American schools. She said it is hard to learn because Arabic is opposite of English. The literacy is scribed from right to

left rather than left to right. Mary compared learning to read and write in Sudan and the United States.

Chalkboards and explaining. Very much like here. Homework . . . bring back next day. Books and papers passed out. Teaching to whole group. Children sit and listen. All happens in school day. When school day is done, teacher is done. If child has question. It is asked during school day. Here teacher focus is on child that needs most help. Focus is on child rather than whole group. Sudan whole group. Here teacher takes a lot of time. In Sudan when class is over, it's over. No individual time. Class time only. All is good in American schools.

(M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

In Mary's home Arabic and English were used equally. Her husband Emmanuel spoke some Dinka to the children so they would know their tribal language. Often the children needed clarification if Emmanuel asked them to get something for him.

Before the children went to school, Mary used English and Arabic in the home. She did not speak Dinka because her tribal language was Moru. Though Mary felt English was important, she also felt it was vital to keep the native language. In Mary's words, "When the children grow up, they can help others who come to the country, but don't speak English. So they can interpret. It is good for them to learn" (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005).

Mary's child Ruth who was in kindergarten at the time of the interview did not have difficulty learning English because she was born in America. Mary described the language learning of both her children.



They learned naturally by playing with children and hearing English all around them at Head Start and at school. They speak with friends, at school, with teacher, wherever they went. Arabic was difficult to continue. Exposure to English comes from Head Start and elementary school. Children's Arabic is not as good as English. We have little time to speak Arabic compared to child's exposure to English. (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

Reading material in Mary's home was predominantly in English. The family had dictionaries in both Arabic and English. Emmanuel had brought some Arabic books with him when he left Sudan. Books and magazines were also available in a local store in Prairieville. Mary informed me that a lot of different countries use Arabic as their main language.

Mary and Emmanuel read to Ruth in English. Emmanuel had not used Arabic to read to Ruth at the time of the interview because he considered her to be too young. There would be too much to learn when trying to read Arabic with script written from right to left and English written from left to right. Mary used literacy to make shopping lists and to make a speech in public at church. She also wrote creative stories for her children. She spoke specifically of Ruth as she said,

My daughter likes to make picture stories. She'll explain and wants mom to write it down. She draws stories. I write what she tells me. She reads story. She wanted me to write everybody's name in family. She has a name list of family names. (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

During Sudanese Sunday worship that Mary attended, the congregation used Bibles in English and Arabic. Also at worship services the family sang in Arabic and English.

On the topic of language usage with friends, Mary said that Ruth occasionally would spend the night in homes of children of Sudanese culture. She also had friends of all cultures. English was the predominant language used when playing with friends, though Ruth sporadically used Arabic with Sudanese friends.

Mary wanted her daughter Ruth to master English language and literacy because in America it is important to communicate with people. Dinka language and literacy learning was not one of Mary's major goals for her daughter. Though it would be nice to learn, Mary did not speak Dinka. Emmanuel used Dinka because it was his tribal language. For Mary, preferred languages in order of importance were English, Arabic, and Dinka. Mary and Emmanuel wanted their children to get as much education as they could. Mary said that a long term goal Emmanuel held for Ruth was to go to college to be a doctor or lawyer.

Mary and Emmanuel have supported Ruth's education consistently in the home setting. They helped Ruth learn letters of the alphabet by reading English books to her. They also help with homework and read books both children brought from school, from Head Start, and from the public library. In Mary's words,

We help with vocabulary learning. We read every night and on weekends two to three books over weekend. Some big books take whole weekend. Some small books two to three a day. She [Ruth] can read and write some words. She's practicing right now. We help so she can be ready for first grade. (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

In Sudan parents helped with homework, some children took classes at home, and some parents hired tutors so their children would do better in school. In the United States Mary

attended teacher conferences and would definitely like to volunteer in school, but working five days a week did not give her the time to do so. As a volunteer Mary would like to be able to help with art projects or make decorations or costumes. Mary also said she could try to teach some words in Arabic or do storytelling in Arabic. Ruth once had a problem at school with the other children.

[At] Head Start Ruth complained kids don't like her and said bad words to her.

Maybe she was not used to school. She used to complain a lot and did not want to go. Teachers didn't know what was going on. Husband went to school and explained. Teachers thought she didn't want to play with others. (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005)

Mary was satisfied with the way the situation was handled because of the noticeable improvement in Ruth's attitude toward school after Emmanuel talked to the teachers. Mary said that since her children were born here they were used to American culture. Ruth has a happy life in the United States. "She likes teacher, friends and likes to be out in public with kids. She doesn't like to stay at home. She wants to go somewhere. She says it's boring at home" (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005).

#### Participant V: Luke

Luke, a church pastor, chose to be interviewed in his office on January 11, 2006. August 11, 1995, brought Luke and his family to the Upper Midwest city of Prairieville. Having left his country of Sudan in 1992 to pursue a Master of Divinity at one of the seminaries in Kenya, Luke, a member of the Bari tribe, was among the early arrivals in Prairieville. I observed Luke as he served as pastor at several memorial services. We



also had an opportunity to converse at a wedding reception and at a community meeting at an interpretive center that was hosting an informative program about Sudanese refugees in our area. The program included the viewing of a documentary film, *The Lost Boys*. The documentary depicted the lives and adjustments of young male Sudanese refugees who banded together as young children when their villages were raided in Sudan. I observed Luke in these instances using English, Arabic, and Swahili.

Luke said this about the turmoil in Africa when he arrived in the U.S.:

I graduated in July [1995] and then I didn't know where to go. The country [Sudan] was already in a mess and I didn't want to go back and jeopardize the security of my children. Education had gone bad in Sudan, too. They suddenly shifted from English as a medium of instruction to Arabic, which we hated because actually we thought the Arabs were enemies. Anything to do with the enemy is not something you like. So I didn't want to take my children back because of the educational system and also to that difficult and insecure place.

(L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke keenly remembered the disruption caused by war in Sudan. His application for refugee status moved much faster than he had anticipated.

You know . . . there were times . . . when I was still in the country . . . when they were bombing the town. You know . . . shelling the town. Bombshells falling everywhere and that would disrupt anything happening in the city. Even when you were having a dinner . . . once they start shelling . . . that's it. You have to take cover and lie down. So getting out was for me a very good opportunity. At that time the Australian government and the Canadian government was [*sic*]

taking refugees for settlement. But the interview is done in the refugee camps. I went to the refugee camp and registered as a refugee in northern Kenya towards the border. That's where I got interviewed. And I was told I passed. And then I completed the process in Nairobi because you have to do medical exams and things like that. So, even faster than I thought, I found myself on a flight to the USA with my family. I didn't even have chance to say goodbye to my parents. They were inside the Sudan, but towards the border . . . hiding there somewhere in the mountains because of the war. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke's educational background was rich. He learned to speak English in primary 1, which lasted for seven years. Learning to read in English was difficult because of few reading materials in English as well as a lack of opportunity to speak English outside the classroom. Lessons in English were only forty-five minutes long. However, the school required children to use English during free play time outside as well as within the school walls.

At one point in his life because of a family move, Luke found himself in an area where he did not know the language.

. . . You know . . . my father was a teacher. So he got transferred . . . to another location where the language spoken there was Alur. And it's a language spoken in Uganda. So the language spoken was Alur, and I suddenly found myself among people who speak a language that I do not understand. So! The only option was for me to use English. You know in order to communicate with everybody there. Actually that helped me because . . . because . . . because I had

no choice. And I had to use English in order to communicate. And I worked hard. And I learned both. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke had a talent for language and learned Alur within a two-month period. He reflected that learning the cultural aspect of a new language, such as idioms or slang, was the most difficult challenge.

Luke reminisced about teaching methods used in Sudan today and during his boyhood. His experiences are in stark contrast to American methods.

Right now [in Sudan], at least they have what they call blackboards like this on the wall. But in the past in my time we wrote in the sand . . . the classroom was under . . . under a tree. And the teacher had a . . . you know those kind of blackboards with a stand. And they would . . . you know . . . write like beginning A, B, C, Ds in Bari . . . you know. And once you master that, so the teacher would expect you to write it in sand . . . you know? You . . . you make the sand smooth, and then you write. Then he'd come and . . . you know . . . and check, "Good, good, good job, good job." And then you rub it and then he goes to the next step. The next step would be now syllables. Okay. Sometimes I think is very good . . . very good system that enables. In fact that's why the . . . the older people [in Sudan] find it hard to . . . to catch up the ESL . . . adult ESL classes because, because they . . . the teaching how they teach kids way is different. It would be very noisy. Like . . . like . . . you know if it is a first grade or primary 1, they would learn by shouting out loud what . . . what means like, "Ah – A." Then he would say, "Repeat. Repeat." So the teacher would . . . would . . . you know



get the kids to pronounce a word or a letter and make them repeat, repeat, repeat until they, they get it. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke feels good about his son Mark because of his positive attitude toward learning. Luke delights in his son Mark's enthusiasm for school. When his older sisters went to school, Mark wanted to go along. Luke and his wife bought a book bag for Mark to put on every morning as he waved goodbye to his sisters. Once Mark began Head Start, he would get dressed early, eager for preschool. Luke said, "So, you know . . . that . . . that's exciting in that every parent would enjoy. Because . . . you know it shows that you . . . you have a kid that likes to go to school" (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006).

The languages used in Luke's home are varied. While Luke learned formal Arabic language and literacy in school, he spoke *colloquial Arabic* socially, an adapted language using people's own pronunciations and idiosyncrasies of the region. Luke's children have lost their ability to speak their native language. Gaining and then losing languages caused Luke to speak with sadness.

We have changed. When we came, because of being on the run from country to country, we almost . . . my children lost our language. It's only me and my wife. The oldest can hear what we say, but all the younger ones do not know. Maybe they know one or two words. And actually, what happened is in Sudan we spoke colloquial Arabic, and they [his children] knew it, and we communicated in that. And then when we moved to Kenya. They learned Swahili. And Swahili quickly became our . . . our . . . we used most of it in Swahili. But we would also would

use a little bit of Arabic. So it would be a mixture of Arabic, Swahili, and English. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke recognized the communication difficulty Mark had because so many languages were used in the home.

We still speak Bari language, sometimes a little colloquial Arabic, sometimes Swahili, too. So . . . and we . . . we try to do it so that the children maybe would get interested and learn it and communicate with us. But, we found it difficult. Because . . . because when for example I speak to all of the kids in one of the languages she [his older daughter] would respond back to me in English. . . . And actually that works negatively too for Mark, the one in Head Start now. Because . . . because here we were using four different languages at the home. Um . . . um sometimes Arabic . . . sometimes Swahili . . . other times English when we talk to the girls. But when we talk with Mark it's either Swahili, um Arabic, or Bari. So I think that confuse Mark. And . . . and it took a while for him to . . . to start learning to speak. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

When Mark entered Head Start, he was enrolled in a program designed to facilitate language acquisition. Luke has observed some progress in Mark's language learning.

But now he's [Mark's] . . . he's . . . he's learning faster. You know. He can express himself. He can at least speak in English. He doesn't remember the other words, but I think what happened here is about there are too many languages going on. And so he . . . he couldn't . . . you know piece . . . connect anything because everything was wrong. When we speak with Mark, we speak Bari, and

he's always around us. And when he's communicating when the girls are around, then the girls speak English. And I think he's confused and he doesn't want to speak because he's confused. But if he used the same language and the same words I think he begins to pick up the language skills and the words and the vocabulary . . . things like that. So that took a while before he started speaking. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke valued his tribal language and wanted to keep it alive for his son. Luke poignantly described the gradual loss of Bari.

You know . . . I just find myself switching to English as if I was a TV . . . you know. I tried. I tried to get him to learn my language, and I attempted and actually preferred calling him by the Bari name, rather than Mark, but everybody was, Mark, Mark, Mark. And I would say a few words in my language . . . you know and try to help him. But that was like a drop in a . . . in an ocean. Because here he is exposed to . . . to . . . to . . . to . . . English, a little Arabic, and Swahili. And here I am, the only one trying to teach a few words and it never worked. And it was very frustrating because I thought, "Well, I'm fighting a losing battle, and there's no need." (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Mark's mother and sisters read children's stories to Mark in English. The number of family members in the home made for a handy supply of readers to Mark. Luke continues to communicate with relatives in Sudan who have access to the internet. Most frequently letters from Sudan are scanned and then FAXed. Relatives would write the letter in Bari, and a person would scan it and E-mail it to Luke. Luke said that letters are



hard to read because sometimes the FAX does not pick up essential diacritical letter markings.

Luke would like to see Mark write in the family's native language, but realized how unlikely this will be. Luke shared his concerns for his son and explained his reasoning punctuated by short bursts of laughter followed by reflective sadness.

Because I think . . . you know . . . I think he's [Mark's] a Bari. And I think . . . you know . . . and he'll never be anything else. So . . . so what good is it if you can't write your own language? That's to me, my biggest concern. And ah . . . you know it's very embarrassing. If for example he . . . he went . . . if he studied up to university level and he became a . . . a doctor, a medical doctor or a teacher . . . you know . . . and then he goes back to my country. And then um . . . and then here he is, regarded as the most . . . you know educated in the community. And . . . and then of course he'd go to a church where . . . where it's . . . everything is done in Bari. And then . . . you know without knowing that you don't speak the language, "Would you like to read . . . you know from Mathew Chapter 3?" That would be embarrassing isn't it? If you said, "No. I don't know how to read." Because . . . because you know, "I thought you were educated." And because they would believe that someone who is educated should . . . should know everything. Things like that . . . so I think it would be a wonderful thing, you know if my . . . my son or even daughters . . . you know . . . knew how to read and write fluently. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke felt that individuals learned a language as he did through speaking and through reading. In the Kubor household, Luke and his wife continued to use Bari

exclusively to speak to each other. The children use the English language with each other and when they responded to the Bari language spoken to them. Frequent use of the English language at home and at school helped them exit from the ESL program. Luke saw the children's rapid rate of English acquisition as an advantage of the decision he and his wife made regarding language usage in the home setting. Luke also reflected sadly on the negative side of his decision in the following manner.

Only bad side is if they meet some of my people. In fact actually when people call my house . . . you know they know I am Barian. And they are talking in Bari and the kids will say, "I don't know." And then they will try to find out why . . . why. "Don't you speak Bari?" They say, "No. I don't speak it." They will make fun of them and say, "What happened? Your dad and mom don't speak it?" The other side will know because they are responding back in English. The other side will be talking in Bari. So it's a little bit embarrassing for me. You know, people will say, "What's going on in here? Why are the children not speaking in Bari?" So that is . . . that is the negative side, but otherwise it helped them. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Luke recalled his oldest daughter having a difficult adjustment to American schools because of the grade she was placed with insufficient language competency. His eldest daughter suffered because she was fourteen and placed in junior high. This was overwhelming for her. Miramontes, Nadeau, and Commins (1997) write,

Second language speakers of English in schools face the dual task of acquiring a new linguistic system and learning academic content. Because of the

overwhelming nature of the task, there is a tendency to feel inadequate at all stages of development even under the best of circumstances. (p. 132)

Luke's other children were placed on the elementary level and learned English quickly.

Luke's elder children blame their parents for not teaching them Bari. The children's attitude is similar to a finding in another study in which a Chinese daughter expressed anger and frustration about her lack of knowledge of her parents' native language and culture (Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995). Yet Luke reveals hesitation about how to go about teaching the language at this point.

### Summary

All Sudanese participants were parents of children between the ages of five and eight. The stories told in a narrative format were supported by direct quotations made by participants during personal interviews collected over a five-month period between August 2005 and January 2006. Additional data collected consisted of observations of participants and settings made by the interviewer during personal interactions with participants. Each participant's story addressed individual background information, language and literacy usage in the home setting prior to and after the child entered a school setting, language and literacy goals held for the child, and each participant's view of their role in their child's education. Other issues participants brought to each interview were also covered in this chapter. Findings are presented in chart form on the following page.



Jacob	William	Teresa	Mary	Luke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Moru Bible, prayer and hymn books in home</li> <li>•No Arabic Bible</li> <li>•No Arabic literature in home</li> <li>•Arabic language of the enemy</li> <li>•Only English books in home</li> <li>•Attended boarding school in Sudan age 12</li> <li>•Is a poet and songwriter in Moru language</li> <li>•Writes in Moru literacy within local community</li> <li>•Left for one year to serve as advisor to educational minister of Sudan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Bibles in Dinka, Arabic, and English in home</li> <li>•English magazines in home</li> <li>•Children did not learn to read or write in Dinka or Arabic</li> <li>•Did not bring Dinka books to USA. Wrote in Dinka and used it for shared reading with other Dinka family members</li> <li>•Attended boarding school in Sudan</li> <li>•Corporal punishment used in Sudan boarding school for failure to recite lessons</li> <li>•Transcribes company rules into Arabic for workers</li> <li>•Has close connection with church. Used tribal language to teach Bible stories and songs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Uses Arabic to read. Did not mention Bible in the home</li> <li>•English reading material in home</li> <li>•No response to type of reading material in the home</li> <li>•Did not reveal educational background</li> <li>•Mother learning English language and literacy in tutorial setting</li> <li>•Told religious stories and stories about grandfather</li> <li>•Has close connection with church</li> <li>•Volunteer cleans at church one day a week. Cooks for social gatherings after church services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Mentioned English and Arabic Bibles in church</li> <li>•Arabic and English dictionaries in home</li> <li>•Arabic and English reading material in home</li> <li>•Uses literacy to make shopping lists and to make a public speech at church</li> <li>•Graduated from high school in USA</li> <li>•Sings in Arabic, English, and Swahili in church</li> <li>•Would definitely like to volunteer in school, but not enough time</li> <li>•Could try to teach some words in Arabic or do storytelling in Arabic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Well used Bible in office with many tabs</li> <li>•Has English literacy in home</li> <li>•Can read Arabic if written in letter rather than symbol graphemes</li> <li>•Uses Bari to write people in Sudan. Some relatives have access to the internet</li> <li>•Would like his child to learn to read and write in Bari</li> <li>•Participant's father was a teacher</li> <li>•Corporal punishment used in Sudan school for failure to use English on school grounds.</li> <li>•Is a church pastor</li> <li>•Connected with college professor to provide college students to tutor children of the congregation</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Literacy in Home, School, and Social Settings Summary Chart.

## CHAPTER IV

### THEMES AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter includes the five major themes of the study, the data supporting each theme, and a discussion of the related literature. The patterns were discovered by analyzing the data presented in Chapter III. That data consisted of parent participant stories related through the interview process, interviewer observations and field notes, and connections to the scholarly literature. The general categories for each participant's story included background information, language and literacy usage, and values or goals. Similarities between categories were identified through a sorting, coding, and theme identification process located in Appendix F.

Initially four themes were identified. One related to the education of male versus female participants and three related to language and literacy usage, values, and goals. A fifth theme emerged over the use of the Arabic language. Though all participants spoke Arabic, individuals varied in their acceptance of Arabic language and literacy.

Following are the five themes identified in this study.

1. Male participants had higher levels of formal education than female participants and actively pursued educational advancement and support for Sudanese located in the USA or Sudan.
2. All participants were multilingual, most were multiliterate, and all used multiple languages in the home.

3. All participants in this study wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy.
4. Most participants in this study wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language as part of their culture.
5. Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language.

#### Theme One: Gendered Educational Levels

Male participants had higher levels of formal education than female participants and actively pursued educational advancement and support for Sudanese located in the USA or Sudan.

Jacob	William	Teresa	Mary	Luke
B.E., English, M.Ed., doctoral student	College freshman	No information available	High school diploma	B.S., M.Divinity

Through the interview process it was learned that two male participants had advanced degrees and one was an undergraduate at a local university. Jacob had a bachelor's degree in English literature, a master's degree in Education, and was enrolled in a doctoral program. William was a college freshman. Luke held an undergraduate degree and a Master of Divinity. All male participants exhibited a good command of English vocabulary to the point of using higher-level vocabulary words and concepts within the interview.

The following excerpt from Jacob's interview was indicative of his command of the English language and reflective of a higher level of education. "And when I went to



school I studied to learn my own vernacular language” (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005). Later in the same interview Jacob said,

So, when I finished my high school I went to college in Egypt and I got my BE in English Literature. And really, I did well. I liked English literature, particularly poetry. I can make poems, I can write poems and I can use a lot of poetic dictions in order to support my own feeling. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Though Jacob was well educated, his wife was not. When responding to how the family used literacy, Jacob responded with the following. “I will write in my own language, but my children nor my wife . . . they don’t. My wife is not educated. She is here in this class learning English. She doesn’t really have any skill” (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005).

William, a college freshman, reflected on his English language learning when he told of his persistence to master the language.

I have the literature books, and then Time magazine and Newsweek. I would try to get ten words a day and look them up. So from there I become encouraged. I come to know to read. Whenever you read more, the more you get exposed to the language. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

Both William’s parents were illiterate. They sent him to a boarding school in Sudan and put their trust in William’s teacher. The following excerpt was reflective of William’s views on how cultural differences affect learning in schools in the United States and Sudan.

Back there [in Sudan] the American culture is like a taboo to us there because everything is open and very rapid. There [in Sudan] is some isolation. Like the school girls different from boys. Girl is segregated. And the people wear dress uniform. You don't just put on what you want and cause kind of interruption [disruption]. Like here a boy can hold a hand with girl and just walk normally like this and nobody's concerned. So they [Sudanese in Sudan] consider them like taboos in my country. They say that this is like Pagan life with non-believers. So, is not encouraged to come to America. They say you will just get lost. You will not go back. So it's like surrendering your people to another country willingly. (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005)

Luke, whose father was a teacher, worked hard at his studies in Sudan. The following excerpt from his interview stands as testimony of his hard work, dedication to learning, and higher-level vocabulary. "And I think I performed superbly. Actually in two months period, I was able to master both Alur and English" (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006). Further on in the interview was a statement that confirmed higher-level thinking and use of vocabulary.

The next stage is actually learning the cultural aspect of the language. There are things about a particular language that a lot of us don't know. You may know how to speak a language fluently, but there are nuances and expressions that are very difficult to understand unless you understand the culture. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

Of the two female participants Mary, who came to the United States at age sixteen, possessed a high school diploma, but information regarding Teresa's educational

background was not available. The interview with Teresa was obtained with considerable difficulty. To simplify the process for Teresa, the number of questions were limited as well as simplified in word choice. This abbreviated format may be found in Appendix H. Information regarding Teresa's educational background was not addressed. She did tell me that she can read, but not write, in Arabic. She did not mention reading or writing in Dinka, and her English writing was very limited. Responses to questions were quite short and often in phrases rather than full sentences. Following is one of her longer responses to the question, *What kinds of things did you do to help your child learn your language? Did you tell stories to your child before he entered school?* "Yes. A lot. Some religious. Jesus crucified. Some about grandfather" (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 22, 2005).

Mary spoke in complete sentences. "Reading material is in English. We have a dictionary in Arabic and in English. I'm too busy with work and home to read. I work five days a week. Sometimes I read a half hour at work during free time" (M. Janusa, personal communication, November 16, 2005).

It was also learned through the interview process that all male participants actively supported educational advancement for Sudanese communities either in the United States or in Sudan. Though working his way through a doctoral program, Jacob, who was an American citizen at the time of the interview, put his personal and educational life on hold to lend his professional expertise to the people of southern Sudan. He left the United States for a one-year period in March 2006 to serve as an advisor to the education minister of Sudan. I learned this information through an article



in the local newspaper on Monday, March 13, 2006, entitled “Helping Rebuild Homeland” and in a phone conversation with Jacob on Tuesday, March 14, 2006.

At the end of the interview with William, a college freshman and father of four, I asked if there was some way I could thank him for his time. Though he first responded in the negative, William changed his mind and asked if I could obtain books on reading or teaching the English language. He wanted to send the books to Sudan because students who attended school there had no textbooks. Books did not need to be new. William said that he was a part of a networking system that acquired and mailed books to Sudan. I was able to obtain books that were being released from a local college elementary curriculum library. William and I met in a university parking lot so I could transfer to his possession the English books and manuals collected.

Further evidence of William’s support of children in the local Sudanese community came forth during the interview. William told me of his attempt to provide religious education taught in tribal languages. William attended the church community that had Luke as its pastor. Luke attempted to obtain funding from the Alliance for African Assistance, an international non-profit support group. Luke, William, and others in the congregation hoped to advance native language learning through Bible study sessions for children. Their fledgling attempts came to an end after three sessions because funding was not available to further their cause.

A final expression of support for the local Sudanese community came up during the interview when William talked of using the Arabic language to transcribe company rules at places of work. William’s transcriptions were posted so non-English speaking Sudanese could know what was expected of them in the workplace.

In order to advance children's learning in his church community, Pastor Luke connected with a local college professor who provided college students from one of her courses to tutor children from his congregation. Luke transported the children to and from tutoring sessions held on church property throughout the school year. He also played a leading role in trying to offer native language learning through Bible study sessions for children. It was through his position as church pastor that an attempt was made to provide such services through the Alliance for African Assistance. Luke further serves the Sudanese religious community during multifaith memorial services. Luke presided at one of the services for Dr. John Garang. He spoke his sermon in English while a member of the congregation translated his words into Arabic so all members could get the message.

#### Theme One Summary

There were uneven levels of education among the participants in the study. The three males ranged from a college freshman level, to a master's degree level, to a doctoral student. Of the two females, one's education was unknown and the other held a high school diploma. Schweitzer et al. (2006) note that "Sudanese society is very patriarchal with clearly prescribed gender roles" (pp. 180-181). This may account for inequity in the levels of education reached by males as compared to females. Schweitzer et al. further assert, "The Christian community while a minority in Sudan are disproportionately represented in the resettled populations globally. This community tends to be well educated and speak English as a second language" (p. 180). The participants in this study surpassed the Schweitzer et al. assertion by speaking a minimum of three languages.



## Theme Two: Multilingualism

All participants were multilingual, most were multiliterate, and all used multiple languages in the home. All participants first learned to speak a tribal language in their southern Sudanese homeland. One male and one female participant spoke Dinka, one male and one female spoke Moru, and one male spoke Bari. One Moru and one Bari male participant emphasized that the Arabic language they spoke was colloquial rather than formal. For each of them their spoken Arabic contained aspects of their tribal language. Four participants learned Arabic in a school setting. The fifth participant spoke Arabic, but was not asked if she learned it in a school setting due to the need to shorten and simplify her interview. Additional languages learned by participants were determined by areas of Sudan or surrounding countries participants occupied. One participant learned an additional language because his father was a teacher who was sent to an area near Uganda where the language spoken was Alur. Following is a breakdown of how each participant used language and literacy in their family and community settings. Languages are listed in the order of the participants' preferences.

Jacob	William	Teresa	Mary	Luke
Moru	Dinka	Dinka	Arabic	Bari
English	Arabic	Arabic	English	Arabic
Arabic	English	English as needed	Moru to instruct	English
				Swahili
				Alur known but not spoken in home. No other members speak Alur.

Jacob was literate in his tribal language of Moru, Arabic, and English. His Moru proficiency was expressed through poetry and songwriting. He was the only participant who mentioned having had two years' instruction in his tribal literacy. Jacob began



studying English in his third year up to the time he entered high school. Arabic was the focus language of his high school years.

Jacob married a woman who was also from the Moru tribe. Their son, David, learned the family's tribal language from his mother in his early years. He did not learn to speak English until he entered school. Jacob reported English as a language David used in school and Arabic as the language he used at home and in Sudanese community gatherings. He did not identify Moru as a language still used in the home setting, but he did say that David could speak three languages. Literacy material available in Jacob's home included a Christian Bible, prayer books and hymnal books in Moru, but not in Arabic.

William's first language was Dinka. He was literate in Dinka, Arabic, and English. He used Dinka language and literacy when Bible reading and singing in Christian churches in Sudan and in the United States. William's formal language and literacy learning began with six years of Arabic. English was introduced as a separate subject in grade seven and maintained all through high school.

William expanded his knowledge of English by reading literature and news magazines. He identified ten new words a day and looked them up in a dictionary. William reported English, Dinka, and occasionally Arabic as languages he and his wife used to communicate with each other. They used Dinka and English, but not Arabic, to communicate with their children. English and some Dinka were languages used among siblings when playing or watching television. William said that his children no longer understood Arabic.

He and others of his community try to keep their tribal language alive by teaching children to sing Dinka hymns in church.

Teresa was not forthcoming regarding her formal education, but reported Dinka and Arabic as primary home languages. Teresa could not read or write in Dinka. She used Arabic to read, but could not write in Arabic. She said English was used in the home on an “as needed” basis. Teresa was trying to learn to read English literacy through private tutoring sessions provided by a volunteer from the Giving and Learning Program that connects refugees to tutor volunteers. I served as her reading tutor on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for five months. Teresa said that her brother provided support for the children when they needed help with their homework. Teresa’s command of English was the least proficient of those interviewed. She agreed to be interviewed in the presence of her brother. Teresa did not mention having a Christian Bible in the home, but she was a very active participant in the church community where she sang hymns in Arabic.

Mary, who entered the United States when she was sixteen years old, did not use her tribal Moru language in the home setting. She reported Arabic and English as home languages used about equally. Dinka, the tribal language of Mary’s husband, was used occasionally to help their children learn the language. Mary did not speak Dinka, but referred to Dinka as the children’s tribal language.

Mary learned Arabic language and literacy in Sudan. She said she went to two schools. Arabic was used through sixth grade. The education equivalent was similar to beginning high school in the United States. She then switched to English, but only had two years’ instruction because of the outbreak of the war in Sudan. Mary completed her

high school education in the United States. She mentioned having difficulty because she did not understand the English language well enough to support her high school learning. She used dictionaries in English and Arabic to support English language and literacy acquisition. Mary and her husband read extensively to their children in English. Mary also mentioned singing hymns in English, Arabic, and Swahili in church settings.

Luke was the most multilingual participant in the group interviewed for this study. He stated Bari, some Arabic, some Swahili, and English as languages actively used by him and his wife. In addition, Luke learned the Alur language when he was young. His father was a teacher who took a post near Uganda. Alur was the dominant language used in that area of the country and Luke and his cousin learned the language in order to communicate with their fellow students. Later, when Luke was married, he moved his family to Kenya while he worked on his Master of Divinity. Since Swahili was the dominant language used in Kenya, the family learned and used Swahili to communicate.

Luke and his wife used Swahili, Arabic, or Bari when speaking to each other in the home setting. Both Luke and his wife used Bari when speaking to their child Mark in his pre-school years. Siblings used English when speaking to one another. Luke stated that Mark had difficulty learning to communicate because so many languages were used in the home. Luke and his wife used Swahili, Arabic, or Bari when they spoke to Mark. Mark's sisters used English when they spoke to him. When Mark entered Head Start, he needed language support in order to learn English at a higher level. At the time of the interview Mark was able communicate in English and Bari.



Literacies used by Luke are Bari, English, and Arabic. Luke said that he continued to use Bari, to communicate with family members and friends who remained in Sudan. Communication was in the form of telephone calls, E-mails, and letters. Luke is quite proficient in English and can read Arabic if it is written in letter rather than symbol format.

### Theme Two Summary

All participants in the study spoke a minimum of three languages, and many were able to read two languages or more. The more fluent one is in a language, the more one understands about the culture in which the language is spoken. Because of their acquaintance with from three to five languages, the Sudanese refugees comprising this research study could function in various cross-cultural situations and attached high value to their children becoming, at the very least, bilingual, or more.

### Theme Three: Desire for English Competency

Though all participants in this study wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy, they varied in their reasoning and the emphasis put on English used in the home setting. Two male participants wanted their children to be proficient in English because it is an international language. One male participant and one female participant wanted their children to be able to communicate with people in the local community or with people in general. A final female participant wanted her child to be able to communicate in English because the family lived in the United States.

In addition, one participant wanted his child functional and productive as a citizen. Another felt that school was where all cultures came together and in order to communicate it was necessary to have one unified language. The participant who spoke

five languages would like his child to study other languages in addition to English. And finally the participant whose two children were born in the United States said that a long term goal held by the father for his six year old daughter was that she would go to college to be a doctor or a lawyer. Mushi's (2001) study of immigrant parents also found that "parents who came from other countries perceive the English language as a tool for upward mobility in society and therefore want their children to learn it and use it proficiently" (p. 21).

All participants interviewed either personally supported their children's educational efforts, or had a relative who was willing to provide such support. The following chart displays all the literacy activities that participants engaged in with their children.

Jacob	William	Teresa	Mary	Luke
Reads to child	Listens to children read	Reads orally along with children in English for tutor	Reads books to child in English on a daily basis	Mother and sisters read books to child in English
Monitors child's reading	Checks children's reading and language comprehension	Attends school conferences	Writes creative stories that child illustrates	Reads to child if child initiates interest
Helps with homework	Writes for children as needed	Uncle reads to child	Child draws pictures and dictates stories to mother who scribes for her	
	Helps with homework	Uncle helps with homework as needed	Helps with homework	
			Brings books home from library	
			Helps with vocabulary and alphabet	
			Attends parent teacher conferences	



Four participants mentioned reading to their child in English. Reading frequency varied. The three participants who personally read to their children did so every night. The one participant who read infrequently said he read to his child when the child came to him with a book and exhibited interest. This participant said that his wife and daughters also read to his son. Since the participant had six daughters there were plenty of readers in the house. The participant who did not read to her son was learning English literacy herself at the time of the interview.

Support of English language learning was also exhibited by parents or relatives who helped children with homework. Two males and one female participant were actively involved in homework support. Of the two male participants, one waited for his child to learn English in the school setting. The Moru tribal language and Arabic were used in the child's early life. Though this child did not speak English before he entered school, he had the daily after-school support of his father who read with him every day and oversaw his homework activities. As a beginning third grader, the child was able to speak three languages, which included the English he learned in school. His father reported that the child's Arabic was very good.

The second male participant who helped his child with homework had a different story to tell. Though he himself learned English in a school setting in Sudan, he and his family used Arabic to communicate. He told of having neglected the English language in preference to Arabic when the family lived in Sudan. When the family moved to the United States, his children had difficulty because English had been used infrequently prior to their arrival. This participant had children in the first and third grades in addition to children in sixth grade and middle school at the time of the interview. He reported



having spent a good deal of time in support of his children's learning not only by overseeing homework, but by questioning comprehension, writing for the children, and having the children read to him. This participant, whose own parents were illiterate, felt blessed because he was able to help his children in this manner. He said that helping his children made him feel like he was a part of the community.

One female participant supported her child's learning when she helped with homework and vocabulary development. She also wrote creative stories for both her children and scribed stories her daughter dictated. Her daughter, who was six years old and in kindergarten, would then illustrate the stories her mother scribed for her.

The participant who was learning English literacy herself used her brother for homework support on an "as needed" basis. She wanted Arabic and Dinka used in the home setting, and English at school.

Finally, one male participant did not mention homework support. He did not believe in forcing a child to learn. This participant felt he was helping his child by giving him the freedom to use English in the home setting so he could be weaned from ESL. Since four languages were used in the home, the child's use of the English language would help him focus on learning that language.

### Theme Three Summary

Participants valued the power of English to help their children's school achievement and upward mobility as they became older. Parents had high expectations of their children and commonly supported homework and literacy events in the home such as book reading on a regular basis. This finding agrees with Mushi's (2001) study of thirty-two immigrant families in Chicago. In that study, Mushi also found that parents

wished their children to be skilled in both English and their native language with slightly more preference for English.

#### Theme Four: Maintenance of Tribal Language

Most participants in this study wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language as part of their culture. Of the participants in this study, four wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language. The fifth participant was from the Moru tribe and spoke Moru as a tribal language. Her husband was of the Dinka tribe and spoke Dinka as a tribal language. The participant did not know how to speak her husband's tribal language. Their common language was Arabic. The participant rated language mastery in order of importance as English, Arabic, and Dinka. Had her husband been the participant interviewed, the response to this query may have been different. The participant said that her husband did try to teach his tribal language to their children. When the participant referred to the children's tribal language, she recognized Dinka (the husband's language) rather than Moru (her language) as tribal.

In a position statement about linguistically diverse children's learning their home language, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995) stated,

Language development is essential for learning, and the development of children's home language does not interfere with their ability to learning English . . . knowing more than one language is a cognitive asset . . . educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect (hold in high regard) and value (esteem, appreciate) the home culture, and promote and encourage the active involvement and support of all families. (p. 1)

The reasons participants gave for wanting their children to maintain their tribal language varied. One male and one female participant wanted tribal language maintained as a part of the family's culture. As one participant stated, "It identifies where you come from" (T. Muagi, personal communication, October 22, 2005). Lightbrown and Spade (2002) assert that

[there are concerns] when children are virtually cut off from their family language when they are "submerged" in a second language for long periods in early schooling or day care. In such cases, children may begin to lose the family language before they have developed an age-appropriate mastery of the new language. (p. 9)

One male participant felt tribal language was important to maintain so it could be used in social and church settings. He also shared his concern regarding alienation when his children visit Sudan if they forget the Dinka tribal language.

Children who are proficient in their home language are able to maintain a connectedness to their histories, their stories, and the day-to-day events shared by parents, grandparents, and other family members who may speak only the home language. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995, p. 5)

The male participant who spoke five languages wanted his child to be literate in Bari because his child is Bari and will never be anything else. The participant wanted his children to know Bari so they can locate relatives in Sudan and learn about their ancestors. The same participant talked of phone calls to the home. He said that if the caller spoke in Bari when one of the children answered, the child would be embarrassed because she could not communicate in Bari. The caller would ask her why she did not



know the Bari language. This ties in with William's statement saying that those who come to America give themselves to another culture willingly.

Two male participants addressed expectations of their children if they should return to Sudan. One participant feared his children would be alienated when they visited Sudan if they forget the Dinka tribal language. The other male participant said that if his child would return to Sudan as an adult, he would be expected to know Bari language and literacy, especially if he were college educated. The participant, who was a pastor, gave an example of the adult child as an honored guest being asked to read from the Bible. Not being able to do so would cause the congregation to respond with incredulity at a person who should be considered an educated man who could not speak his tribal language.

The third male participant felt very strongly about having his child maintain the family's tribal language. He told the story of what happened to his uncle's family. His uncle was coming home from work during his lunch hour. When he was still a distance from his home, but within eyesight of his wife, she called out to him in their tribal language. The house was surrounded by government troops. They had not yet entered their home. In their tribal language she warned her husband not to come inside. Still using their tribal language, she told her children to go to their father. The children who understood their tribal language obeyed and were saved. The children who were too young to understand their tribal language stayed with their mother. The government troops who were still outside the house spoke Arabic and did not understand what the woman was saying. The troops entered and killed everyone, including the children. The participant's aunt was pregnant at the time. This powerful story is the background for the

participant's statement, "Knowledge of your own language is an important weapon against an enemy who does not know what you are saying" (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005).

In another study of parents and children's language and literacy, "parents want their children to remain bilingual and bicultural; however, those interviewed believed that the school could not be expected, realistically, to provide instruction for maintenance of a diversity of languages" (Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995, p. 358).

#### Theme Four Summary

Participants realized the intimate link between family and the familiar, between culture and language. Most participants felt deeply committed to helping their children learn their tribal language, for how else could the children communicate with loved ones back home? If they returned to Sudan as educated people in adulthood, how could they share their knowledge and, indeed, themselves with the community? As some participants watched their children lose the "mother tongue," they expressed frustration and sadness.

#### Theme Five: Participants Varied in Use and Acceptance of Arabic

Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language. Arabic was viewed by some Sudanese as *the language of the enemy*. Animosity toward the Arabic language stems from the civil war in Sudan which has been particularly brutal and long lasting.

During part of its history Sudan was a colony run by the governments of Egypt and the United Kingdom with English as its official language. The population of

northern Sudan was predominantly Arab speaking and Muslim in faith. The population of southern Sudan was composed of numerous tribes speaking individual tribal languages with predominantly Christian or animist religious beliefs.

Sudanese independence was granted in 1956 with a provisional constitution that provided self governance and self determination. Power of leadership was given to the Arab-led northern government in Khartoum which did not create the federal system agreed upon in the provisional constitution. The government of northern Sudan abolished agreements to southern Sudan and forced the Arabic language and Islamic laws on the people of southern Sudan causing civil strife that is continuous to this day except for an eleven-year peace period.

Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language. Though all participants spoke Arabic, some expressed ambivalent feelings toward the language because they considered it *the language of the enemy*. During this segment I will use specific participant names so connections can be made to some of the participant's previous stories.

One participant stated that his family used Arabic in the home setting. When the war broke out in southern Sudan, the family had to leave the country. The children were not able to master their own tribal language before they left, so Arabic was the only language available to them. A participant said,

Arabic is the only thing that's dominating. I'm really, really disappointed because . . . the war made my children not too ready to leave their state. The state that I am now in, I brought two of my elder daughters. They lost their own education when we left from Sudan; we went to Egypt, to Libya. And there they were



taught Arabic. And they really didn't master that Arabic because we have to leave Libya and come to Egypt to struggle for . . . a settlement. So all the time we were floating, floating, floating and they didn't really got any chance. They didn't get any chance of a . . . consistency in order to go to schools. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

When asked if he had Arabic reading material in the home, this participant spoke emphatically.

No! We don't have Arabic! We want to have English! We don't like it [Arabic]. You know, because – some people, they take Arabic language as a language of enemy, and they *hate* it. You see? They *hate* it. So we don't have, ah, any Arabic book in our own house. We don't have it. We only have English books and we have some of our language [Moru]. (J. Ajmenja, personal communication, August 27, 2005)

Though this participant was passionate about Arabic literacy, he felt it was important to know the enemy's oral language for self protection.

The same participant shared a personal story of what happened to his uncle's family as a result of being overcome by Arabic speaking government troops. It was knowledge of the Arabic language in addition to their tribal language that saved his uncle and older cousins from sharing the fate of his aunt and young cousins who were killed by the troops. Arabic was a language forced on his family because of government edict. The war caused the family to flee from Sudan to Egypt to Libya to the United States. Education was fragmented. Because of the war even Arabic language and literacy was not achieved with a high level of proficiency on the part of his children.

The third participant did not reveal her feelings regarding the Arabic language. The children spoke Dinka and Arabic and English on an “as needed” basis in the home. The fourth participant, who appeared to be in her mid twenties, had a completely different attitude toward the Arabic language. She felt that Arabic instruction in school would be welcome. Thus the two female participants did not express animosity toward the Arabic language or literacy. Both spoke Arabic in their homes and were literate in Arabic.

A second participant is literate in Dinka, Arabic, and English, and he discontinued using Arabic in the home when he moved to the United States. Only Dinka and English were to be used in the home. In his words, “Not Arabic! They don’t understand. I try not to expose them to it because it would be no use for them to have it here” (W. Gerwagwa, personal communication, September 15, 2005).

The fifth participant spoke of not knowing where to go with his family after he completed his Master of Divinity in 1995.

I graduated in July and then I didn’t know where to go, because the country was already in a mess and I didn’t want to go back and jeopardize the security of my children. Education had gone bad in the Sudan, too, because they suddenly shifted from English as a medium of instruction to Arabic, which we hated, because actually we thought the Arabs were enemies. Anything to do with the enemy is not something you like, as so I didn’t want to take my children back because of the educational system and also to that difficult and insecure place. (L. Kubor, personal communication, January 11, 2006)

The above participant who was a church pastor expressed animosity toward the Arabic language, but offered separate church services in English and Arabic languages on a regular basis. He also made the church available for Dinka language services. It was interesting to note that he did not have an Arabic Bible. It was not made clear whether Arabic Bibles were available in letter format reading from left to right in addition to character format reading from right to left. Participants interviewed were not able to decipher classical Arabic literacy.

#### Theme Five Summary

The Arabic that Sudanese participants spoke was “colloquial,” which means that it was Arabic intermixed with terms and pronunciations from their native languages. There were varying degrees of acceptance of Arabic among the participants, ranging from a passionate rejection to unemotional acceptance. It may be that those participants who expressed the most negative opinions had background experiences that politicized the language. Their associations of Arabic coupled it with power, violence, and even death. Other participants, of different ages and experiential backgrounds, viewed Arabic benignly: as a means to unite all Sudanese in a common communication system.

#### Summary of Themes and Discussions

This study involved the language and literacy background and usage of five Sudanese refugee participants who were parents of children ranging in age from five to eight. Initially four themes were identified in analysis of data collected from personal interviews and observations in home, church, and social settings. A fifth theme emerged when some dissonance was discovered over the use of the Arabic language. Though all



participants spoke Arabic, individuals varied in their acceptance of the language and literacy.

Data analysis revealed the following five themes in this study:

1. Male participants had higher levels of formal education than female participants and actively pursued educational advancement and support for Sudanese located in the USA or Sudan.
2. All participants were multilingual, most were multiliterate, and all used multiple languages in the home.
3. All participants in this study wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy.
4. Most participants in this study wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language as part of their culture.
5. Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language.

The results of this study revealed all Sudanese participants interviewed provided language-rich home environments for their children. Male participants were well educated. Most participants actively reinforced or enhanced their children's learning on a regular basis. English language and literacy learning was valued as was proficiency in tribal languages. Most young children who had parents in this study spoke two languages and two spoke three languages. In some cases dual languages spoken were tribal and English; in other cases they were Arabic and English.

Use of the Arabic language varied with individual participants. One participant spoke Arabic in the home, but was adamant about not having Arabic literature. One

participant no longer spoke Arabic in the home, but transcribed in Arabic for others outside the home on an “as needed” basis. Two participants used Arabic and one other language about equally in their homes. One of the participants used her tribal language equally to Arabic; the other participant used Arabic and English equally.

The fifth participant used four languages dependent on which family member was conversing. He and his wife use his tribal language and Arabic. His wife learned his tribal language when she was twenty. The couple conversed in English with their daughters. They were starting to focus on English with their son who was hearing four home languages in his early years.

In conclusion, the study revealed commonalities among participants: a difference in educational attainment among themselves by gender, high value placed on education for themselves and their children, a desire for their children’s proficiency in both English and their tribal languages, and ambivalent attitudes toward Arabic partly because of its political connotations.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the language and literacy values and goals of a linguistically diverse Sudanese refugee population residing in the Upper Midwest. Five parents of children ranging in age from five through eight were interviewed. All parents were members of the Southern Sudanese refugee population. Two participants were native to the Dinka tribe, two to the Moru tribe, and one to the Bari tribe. The research question guiding the study was *What values or goals do parents of linguistically diverse Sudanese refugee learners have regarding language and literacy acquisition of their native and newly-acquired languages?* The rapid change in the linguistic background of the U.S. student population along with the projected pattern of continued growth indicated a need for research addressing language and literacy practices of populations who speak a language other than English.

This study took place in a midwestern metropolitan community of approximately 200,000 people. Fieldwork done in a pilot study determined the feasibility of using the area as a source for the study. It was the findings from the pilot study that led me to question whether the language and literacy values and goals of members of a refugee population who were parents of young children differed from those of voluntary immigrants. In the pilot study participants of voluntary status actively worked toward the



acquisition and maintenance of native languages for their children and the participant of refugee status did not. Though the pilot study with three participants was too small to support a conclusion, I found the difference intriguing.

The participants of the study for this dissertation disaffirmed the pilot study finding. Of the five participants interviewed for this study, four held the acquisition of native languages in high esteem. The fifth participant did not speak the same native language as her husband and thus had no way to support her children's native language learning. In spite of their efforts, all participants saw the strength of native language learning on the wane. They responded with concern and regret for the loss of something they held so dear. To these participants language was intrinsically entwined with culture.

Qualitative methods followed an ethnographic approach in order to access the population for potential participants. Methods I used were participant and setting observations, formal interviews, and written along with recorded data collecting. Issues related to limited English proficiency, goals parents held for their children, and languages and literacies used in home, school, and social settings surfaced during this study. In a separate chapter, each participant's story was presented. The information gleaned from these narratives was analyzed resulting in five themes that are listed below.

Theme One: Male participants had higher levels of formal education than female participants and actively pursued educational advancement and support for Sudanese located in the USA or Sudan.

Theme Two: All participants were multilingual, most were multiliterate, and all used multiple languages in the home.

Theme Three: All participants in this study wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy.

Theme Four: Most participants in this study wanted their children to maintain the family's tribal language as part of their culture.

Theme Five: Participants in this study varied in their use and acceptance of the Arabic language.

### Conclusions

There are four conclusions that are salient from this study.

The first is that linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Sudanese refugee populations are rich and diverse. I did not anticipate the extensive knowledge base of the parents I interviewed. All participants spoke a minimum of three languages. Civil war in their country caused them to leave their homeland to seek refuge in several countries before settling in the United States. Living in a variety of cultural settings and using languages other than their tribal languages provided the refugee population in this study with a uniquely rich and diverse linguistic and cultural background.

Many teachers need to know more about the refugee populations in their classroom communities. Flores, Cousin, and Diaz (1998) uncover myths held as beliefs by many educators, such as "at-risk children have a language problem. Their language and culture is deficient. They lack experiences. These deficits cause them to have learning problems" (p. 29). Viewing linguistic and cultural diversity as an opportunity for all students to have a pluralistic rather than parochial education would be a powerful detriment to the deficit learner mind set.

Second, Sudanese refugee parents value their own education and the education of their children. The extent of educational accomplishments of the participants in this study is impressive when one considers that a high school diploma and advanced degrees were attained while using languages other than native to the participants. Participants went to great lengths to support the learning of their children. Four of the five participants in this study oversaw their children's homework on a regular basis. The fifth participant had a child in Head Start and homework was not an issue. The parent whose English was less proficient than her Arabic or tribal language engaged her brother into supervising the homework of her children.

Parents in this study also wanted their children to be competent in English language and literacy. To this end parents read to their children on a daily basis or had someone read to them regularly. One parent wrote creative stories which her child illustrated. The child followed her mother's model by illustrating pictures of her own stories and asking her mother to scribe what she wanted to say. Once again Flores et al. (1998) write, "At-risk children have problems because parents don't care, can't read, or don't work with them" (p. 31). The findings of this study dispel the myth. The parent who generated original literature with and for her daughter also stated that she would like to help in the classroom setting if she had time. Art projects, costume-making, and storytelling in Arabic were some of the classroom activities that interested her. Other participants also read to and listened to their children read. Teachers need to communicate with parents to find out what kind of support the parents of diverse learners can offer in the classroom or home settings.



Third, native languages, literacy learning, and maintenance were important to participants of this study as a means of honoring family culture.

The Sudanese refugee community spoke colloquial Arabic as a language that bound all Sudanese together. In spite of their knowledge of two universal languages, Arabic and English, all but one participant said it was essential for their children to maintain the family's tribal language most assuredly and tribal literacy if at all possible. The one participant who did not feel strongly about tribal language maintenance did not speak the same tribal language as her husband. She had no way of supporting her children's language acquisition in a language she did not know.

An important theme that resonated throughout the interviews was participant conviction that language was inextricably intertwined with culture. Their language had value. Their culture had value. To deny the one would be to denigrate the other. Participants revealed the opinions of relatives who remained in Sudan on this issue. Sudanese who do not speak their tribal language were no longer of use to the community. The people of Sudan viewed parents who left the country and who did not maintain tribal languages for their children as people who had willingly given their culture away. Participants who revealed this information did so with sadness in voice and demeanor as they reflected on their own family members who no longer spoke tribal languages. Speaking of those refugees who do suffer language and culture loss, Nieto (2000) makes this judgment:

Losing one's culture and language is too high a price to pay for academic success and social acceptance. . . . Because culture and language help to define the very

soul of a people, to insist on wiping them out is both an unusually cruel strategy and, in the end, a counterproductive one. (p. 4)

Fourth, involvement in an ethnographic approach can be a life-changing experience for the ethnographer. Though the tangible reward of completing this dissertation is the attainment of a Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning, the intangible reward is the learning I gained on the journey. Accessing the study's participants through an ethnographic approach which took me into their community gatherings changed me in ways I had not anticipated. Pursuit of an ethnographic study not only changed me as a researcher, it changed me as a person. Now that I've attained this knowledge, I plan to do something meaningful for the Sudanese community. I would like to be instrumental in creating bridges between tribal and English language and literacies for the Sudanese community. When I started this endeavor I was completing a task. As I near the endpoint I find that the task has completed me.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

This study raises several different questions. As I initially set out to choose a research topic, my focus was on culturally and linguistically diverse learners, but did not specifically focus on refugee learners. My interest in refugee populations developed because I wanted the results of my research to benefit the school community involved in the study. The impact of administrators, parents of the diverse student population, parents of the student population at large, supportive organizations, and the whole community in which the population resides could also be further researched.

A topic for additional research could focus on pre-service and in-service teacher training for working with students who are culturally, linguistically, and economically

diverse. A study canvassing pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and elementary student and parent perceptions before, during, and after field experiences in culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse settings could give direction to teacher education programs.

Another study could look at mentoring programs pairing linguistically diverse refugee parents with volunteer parents from the community. This could be done through a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) newcomer mentoring program. A study of this sort could look at the impact mentoring might have on literacy-related activities refugee parents use in the home with their children. In addition, studying the efficacy of family literacy programs would be interesting. Darling and Westberg (2004) suggest that

family literacy programs are ideal settings for developing systematic training for parents to teach their children to read. As parents learn about the essential skills for reading and practice these skills with their children, they can support their children's reading acquisition while improving their own. (p. 51)

One of the findings of my research was the value parents placed on maintaining their tribal languages. One could institute and then study the effects of language and literacy support groups which involve parents and children who met regularly for the purpose of native language reading and writing. These literacy sharing groups could use formats such as original prose, poetry, and autobiographical stories written in their native language and illustrated by parents. Retired teachers might be interested in participating in such a program which would show support for native language and literacy acquisition and maintenance by means of role modeling, valuing, and honoring the home language.



## Recommendations for Teacher Education

Pre-service teachers need a richer background in the immigrant experience, as well as a challenge to common misperceptions, such as “the notion that children who do not yet speak English lack language altogether is a prevalent one in the United States, and it is linked with the mainstream perception that cultures other than the dominant one lack importance” (Nieto, 2000, p. 189). Other suggestions in the literature include that the school view a second language is a plus for a child, not a minus; that teachers and staff educate themselves about children and languages from the diverse cultures in their own classrooms; and that other languages should be valued and prominently displayed in the school, perhaps on bulletin boards (Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995). Edwards et al. (1999) state,

Teachers tend to ignore the “cultural variables” (i.e., social organization, sociolinguistics, cognition, and motivation) and potential “cultural conflicts” (i.e., learning style, interactional or relational style, communication, and differing perceptions of involvement) that contribute to the disconnections between home and school literacies. (p. 9)

Other researchers note that traditional approaches to parent involvement may not meet the specific needs of parents of other cultural and linguistic groups (Prewitt-Diaz, Trotter, & Rivera, 1989). Among the specific considerations needed by refugee parents are the following put forward by Miller-Lachmann and Taylor (1995):

Parents may need interpreters, provisions for transportation, training in educational assistance to children at home, support groups, meetings in the

community as opposed to at the school, and understanding of their culturally based styles of interpersonal relationships by the school personnel. (p. 24)

Because the majority of teacher preparation programs are composed of students with European roots, universities should continue to establish priorities for recruiting students and pre-service teachers from underrepresented groups. They should also expand curricula to reflect skills in cross-cultural competence (Hanson, 2004).

Cross-cultural competence is defined as “the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build on ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity” (Lynch, 2004, p. 50).

The definition assumes that all individuals and groups are diverse and does not imply that one group is normative. It is founded in the belief that cultural competence is a process, not an endpoint. It also acknowledges that sociocultural factors are as, or more, influential in people’s shared or unshared experience as their ethnicity, language, or culture. (Lynch, 2004, pp. 43-44)

#### Recommendations for Schools

Schools reflect society, and thus the family forms prevalent in society. One strategy for administrators and teachers is to enlarge their views of the cultural backgrounds of families. Rather than seeing families as either matching the middle class white model or not, Lynch (2004) suggests seeing families along a continuum of characteristics. This is a good place to start raising the consciousness of school workers in general. All families fall someplace on these continua.

## *Cultural Continua*

Extended family and kinship networks	Small unit families with little reliance on the extended family
Interdependence	Individuality
Nurturance of young children	Independence of young children
Time is given	Time is measured
Respect for age, ritual, and tradition	Emphasis on youth, future, and technology
Ownership defined in broad terms	Ownership is individual and specific
Differentiated rights and responsibilities	Equal rights and responsibilities
Harmony	Control. (p. 50)

Other ways schools can welcome refugee parents is to provide a special place where parents can meet, along with bulletin boards and user friendly and culturally sensitive parent handbooks. Some schools create a lending library of books and magazines about child development plus toys, children's books, and records that can be checked out. For low-income families, providing a clothing and food exchange (from gardens) is another service that schools can provide (Croft, 1979).

Parent involvement programs should seek help from families, elders, and the cultural community to help incorporate children's home cultures into the curriculum, as well as involving parents in their child's assessment and recommendations. Members of school committees should include representatives of families from diverse backgrounds. Written communication should be meaningful and when necessary, translated (Lim, 2003).

### Recommendations for Teachers

The professional literature is rich with suggestions for teachers who work with ELL students. However, before good teaching strategies and before new books and transformed curricula, teachers need to take a look at themselves. Part of the task is to gain "awareness of one's own life experiences related to culture and contact with other cultures, with a conscious assessment of how those experiences formed personal prejudices" (Segal & Mayadas, 2005, p. 568). Beyond this, teachers as lifelong learners



need to educate themselves about the cultures of the children and family they serve. Florio-Ruane (1994) suggests that teachers form “Autobiography Clubs” in which they read memoirs “as a way to learn about literacy, culture, and identity in their own lives and lives of persons whose backgrounds differ widely from their own” (p. 55).

At the end of my teaching career, the extent of my multicultural curriculum reflected Banks’ (1999) levels one and two, the contributions and additive approaches. Teachers and administrators need to move on to Banks’ levels three and four, the curriculum transformation and social action approaches. They do this by enabling students to view concepts, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse cultural groups. For example, a class could study Columbus Day from the Native American point of view. Going beyond this approach, teachers could empower students to make decisions and take actions on important social issues. For example, if the class was studying community workers, students could survey the books in the school library to determine whether or not ethnic diversity was represented. As a class project, students could write a letter requesting the acquisition of a broader array of books embracing wider ethnic representation.

Beyond classroom teaching, professionals need to reach out to establish partnerships with parents of refugee children. This can be accomplished by enhancing their background knowledge of the families they serve. To that end, see Appendix K which contains an Interview Format to use with refugee parents. Appendix L also includes a list of Positive and Negative Ways of Working With Refugee Parents.

Fuller (2003) offers a useful checklist for teachers who work with low-income parents (and many refugee families are also economically challenged):

1. Check your attitude
  - Do you blame the victim?
  - Do you deny the effects of poverty?
2. Know the environment in which your low-income children live
  - Walk the children's neighborhood
  - Ride the school bus of your rural students
  - Note the nature of the housing where your students live
3. Gather basic information about low-income families
  - Number of children in household
  - Working situation of parents
4. Communicate with low-income parents
  - Contact parents about positive things their child does
  - Use phone if available; if not, write notes or visit the home
5. Get low-income families actively involved: Create a partnership
  - If parents cannot attend meetings, then meet them for coffee
  - Give parents your phone numbers
6. Become involved in the community
  - Attend community celebrations, accept invitations for special events, and attend
7. Be sensitive to the financial limitations of low-income families
  - Note that money for field trips, materials and even participation in sports may not be available from low-income families. (pp. 282-285)

Teachers of refugee students can subtly assist their students in many ways. The children should be warmly included in the classroom community in which there is a spirit of acceptance for all. Teachers should speak clearly, paraphrase often, and use pictures, gestures, graphic organizers, and other visuals to support meaning. They can encourage their students to supplement oral and written communication with art and drama. Finally, these teachers should listen beyond the errors in grammar and respond to the message their students are trying to convey (Boyle & Peregoy, 1990).

Specific teaching strategies recommended by the experts include using the Language Experience Approach (LEA) with learners of all ages (Andersson & Barnitz, 1994; Miramontes et al., 1997; Williams & Snipper, 1990); wordless picture books for teaching vocabulary (Flatley & Rutland, 1986); dialogue journals between student and teacher (Dolly, 1990); with younger students, folk and fairy tales (Williams & Snipper, 1990); patterned and predictable books as example texts because they are filled with repeated phrases, refrains, and perhaps rhymes (Boyle & Peregoy, 1990); and even visual essays using photography, storyboarding, and story maps to present topics (Sinatra, Beaudry, Stahl-Gemake, & Guastello, 1990).

#### Research of the Researcher

In closing, a topic for further research surfaced with a personal finding that was totally unexpected. This topic is how using an ethnographic qualitative approach changes the researcher. There is no question that following the path of an ethnographic qualitative approach has changed me. As Zaharlick (1992) says, "Fieldwork is transformative in that it changes the fieldworkers themselves by increasing their understanding of how culture affects their own behavior and that of others" (p. 123).



Participant stories left me in awe of the struggles they had to overcome to find a peaceful coexistence in a midwestern United States community. Forced to use a language of their enemy in home settings and struggling to keep native languages alive, participants felt that language and culture were inextricably entwined. Language affected their connection to culture and the very essence of self and group identity. Such awareness made me want to be instrumental in helping the Sudanese community make connections between their tribal languages and English. The attainment of a Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning is the end result of my efforts, but having reached this stage, I realize that it is but a stepping stone to work that is still to be done.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Parent Interview Consent Form

You are asked to share your thoughts and feelings in an educational research study led by LaVerne Kingsbury, a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning Department at the University of North Dakota. The study is about how children speak, read and write in their native language and in the English Language. The study is also about the language and literacy goals you as a parent have for your child at home and in school. Your input in this study will provide valuable information for administrators, teachers and students studying to be teachers who belong to a culture other than your own, and who work to understand and meet the needs of students of many cultures in their schools.

You are being asked to take part in two or three interviews lasting 40 to 60 minutes each. After your interviews are completed, you will be asked to allow the researcher to observe the language and literacy use in your home for 30 to 50 minutes. With your permission, pictures, notes, or other literacy items that are made or shared during the observation will be kept or photographed. Also with your permission your child will be asked to share his/her feelings and ideas about speaking, reading and writing in English and in your native language in one or two interviews which will last 15 to 20 minutes each. All interviews will take place in your home or a place of your choice. Interviews and observations will be tape recorded and transcribed without use of your name or the name of anyone in your family. Any information that could identify you, your child or your school district will not be used. The tape recording will be kept in a locked and safe place in the researcher's home until the winter of 2008 when it will be erased. Those in addition to the researcher who will have permission to read the interview files are the researcher's university advisor, Dr. Anne Walker, and persons who examine Institutional Review Board procedures. If the results of this study are submitted to a journal or presented at a conference, association meeting, or school faculty or parent meeting, no identifiable information to you, your school, or school district will be used. Your signed consent form (this letter) will be stored separately from interview information. Both the form and the interview information will be secured and locked in the researcher's home and will be destroyed in the winter of 2008.

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely your choice. You may choose not to be interviewed, or choose not to answer some of the interview questions. You may choose not to take part in a home language and literacy observation, or choose not to permit literacy items made or shared during the observations to be kept or photographed. You may also choose not to allow your child to be interviewed. There is little to no risk that could come from this study because of the strict safeguards that will be followed to make sure you are not identified in any way. You may withdraw from the study at any time before the information you share is published.

If you have any questions at any time about this study and use of the information you share please contact the researcher, LaVerne Kingsbury, at (218) 287-4380 or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Anne Walker, at (701) 777-3162. If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research and Program Development at the University of North Dakota (701) 777-4279.

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by the researcher, LaVerne Kingsbury, her advisor, Dr. Anne Walker, or the Office of Research and Program Development at the University of North Dakota. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I will keep a copy of this consent form for my records.

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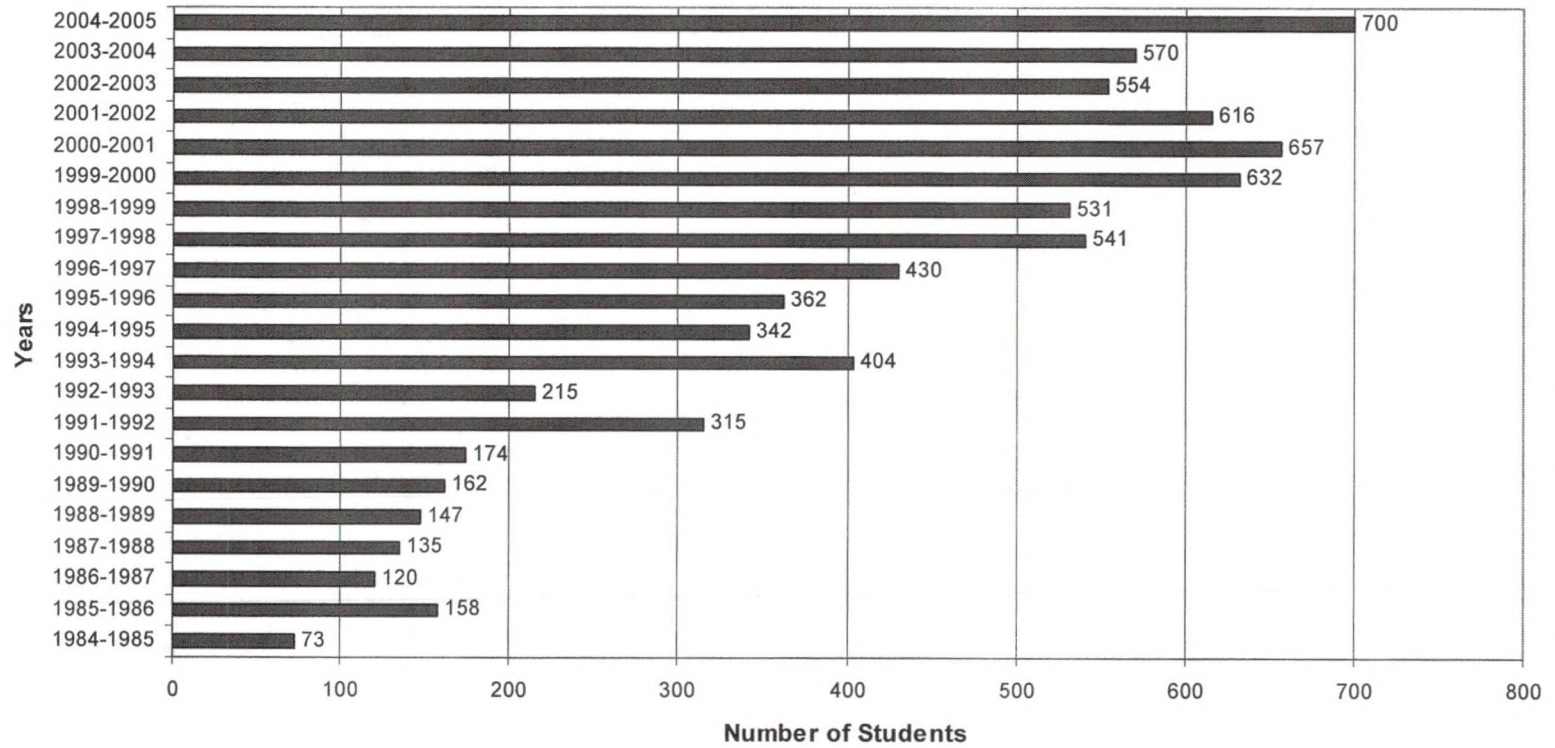
Signature

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Date

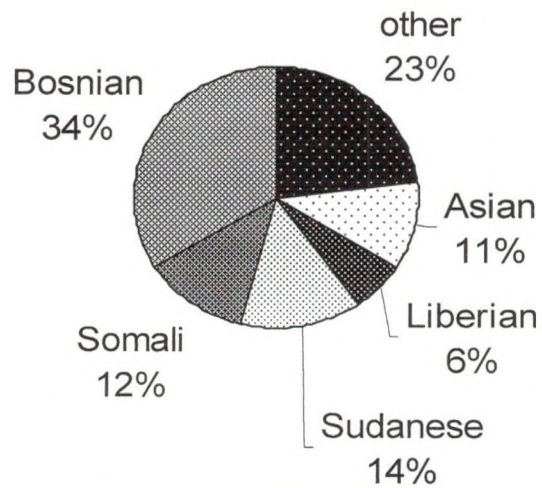


Prairieville Refugee/Non-Refugee Student Count 12-01-04



Appendix C  
LEP Student Count by Language

**LEP Student Count by Language as of  
12-01-04**



## Appendix D

### Difficulty Accessing Refugee Populations

Participants of the Roma Bosnian, Sudanese, and Liberian ethnicities were chosen for the original study because of their numeric impact on the school district of Prairieville. All three ethnicities chosen for the initial study came to the United States as refugees fleeing war-torn nations.

Students of Bosnian ethnicity comprised the largest percentage of the refugee student body, and several classroom teachers and principals in contact with me shared an interest in parent responses from members of the Roma Bosnian ethnicity.

#### *Participant Access Through Administrators*

The formal pathway to participant access was cleared with the school district's Curriculum Director. Two administrative sources, the Community Relations and Planning Director and the English Language Learning Curriculum Director, provided extended support. They not only transmitted refugee population information, but also pinpointed refugee human service organizations and site bases that operated separately from the school district. The Community Relations and Planning Director identified key contact personnel connected with organizations and sites such as the New American Services, Cultural Diversity Resources, Charism Center, and Head Start. The English Language Learning (ELL) Curriculum Director sanctioned funding for interpreters to facilitate the interview process on an *as needed* basis and provided a list of interpreters used by the school district. She also identified two key contact professionals. One served as a home/school liaison and teacher of Evenstart and Adult Education. Another served as director of the Giving and Learning Program which provided human service support for refugees.



All was in place to attain access through the next level of administrators, the school principals, and directors of refugee human service organizations. However, things did not go as planned. The following section describes failed attempts to gain access to participants of Roma Bosnian ethnicity both individually and with an interpreter. These efforts put forth did not come to fruition. They also explain why I changed from a three-culture to a single-culture study.

*Personal Access Attempts With Members of  
Roma Bosnian Ethnicity*

My attempts to make personal contact without use of an interpreter covered a fourteen-month time period in one instance, and a four-month period with the use of an interpreter in another. During this time frame, but over a four-month duration beginning in May 2005, I tried to establish a relationship with Rabija, a woman who approached me in a Sam's Club parking lot with money in her hand. Rabija asked if she could go into the large discount store with me. She did not have a Sam's Club card and wanted to make purchases using her money, but my card. I complied and discovered that Rabija was of Bosnian ethnicity. Her name was also on a list given to me by a school principal. I briefly explained my study and told her I would be calling for an interview. She agreed to the interview, but wanted to meet at a time when her husband was home. We set the time and date.

When I went to Rabija's home, I met not only her husband, Predrag, but her five children and the children's grandparents. We met outdoors during a pleasant summer evening. The family had just completed a light supper at their kitchen table which had been brought outside and placed near their large garden. Predrag's command of the

English language was very good. When I commented on his proficiency, Predrag informed me of his ability to speak three languages. He understood the intent of my study and reviewed the letter of consent found in Appendix A and interview questions found in Appendix I of this dissertation. Predrag said that his wife wanted to learn to speak and read English, but wasn't interested in answering questions.

I asked Predrag if he would be willing to grant me an interview. Saying he was too busy, but he would think about it over the weekend, Predrag asked to keep the questions. He didn't call back. When I called a week later, my request to interview was denied. I called a few weeks after that with an offer to help Rabija connect with the Giving and Learning tutoring program; she thanked me for trying to help, but said they were moving. I thought the timing of their move was unusual because it was the beginning of August. The family would be leaving the bountiful produce from their garden just before harvest time.

*Interpreter Access Attempts With Members  
of Roma Bosnian Ethnicity*

Throughout the period of informal attempts, I continued to utilize formal participant access methods. Since potential participants were members of ethnicities with a primary language, literacy, and culture other than my own, I was uncertain of communication proficiency. I decided to use an interpreter to make initial contacts with potential participants of Roma Bosnian ethnicity. My decision was supported by Seidman's (1998) directive to use peers rather than a social hierarchy to gain access, my failed attempts to gain access with two potential participants met on my own, and a

perception shared by a school principal regarding Roma Bosnians' mistrust toward officials.

I began interpreter involvement early in July 2005 by cultivating a relationship with Denira, who served as a Bosnian interpreter for the school district on an *as needed* basis. A member of the Bosnian but not Roma Bosnian culture, Denira came highly recommended by the Prairieville district's ELL Director as one who respected, understood, and was non-judgmental toward members of the Roma Bosnian culture. During a luncheon I clarified the intent of my research, making it possible for Denira to transfer information to potential participants. I gave her an abstract of the study, a letter of consent, and a copy of questions I planned to use in the interview. The names of potential participants were released when Denira agreed to intercede.

During a three-month time frame Denira and I kept in consistent E-mail contact to convey information regarding potential participants. All E-mail contact in reference to access attempts has been retained and recorded in printed form and kept in a secure place in the researcher's residence. Out of seven attempts only one person signed a letter of intent granting access to one interview. A second session with the same participant was needed. Mejra, the participant, told Denira she would like her husband to be present during the second interview. Though several attempts were made to schedule a second interview, Mejra's husband was unwilling or unable to participate. He told Denira he was too busy in spite of the fact that Denira and I made ourselves available during daytime and evening hours.

Up to this point in time I had hoped to utilize a three interview format designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982): a first interview with a focus on life history, a



second on details of the experience, and a third that reflected on meaning (pp. 11-12).

Because of my participants' busy lives, I condensed my interview questions so they could be addressed in one session, while keeping the three-pronged focus as recommended by Dolbeare and Schuman. The first portion of the interview addressed the history of language and literacy use in the home setting. The second portion addressed details of school literacy experiences in native and new school environments. The final portion reflected a focus on language, literacy, and social relationship goals for the future. By condensing the interview process into one manageable session, I hoped that individuals would be more willing to participate. The first set of interview questions plus the slightly abbreviated set may be found in Appendix I and Appendix J respectively.

When access was denied for a second interview with Mejra, I asked Denira to intercede for me by contacting Predrag, husband of Rabija, the woman I met at Sam's Club. I hoped that trust could be established if someone using his native language spoke on my behalf. When relating the content of the phone call to me, Denira said that Predrag seemed suspicious of the interview. Segal and Mayadas (2005) note that

a number of immigrants and most refugees arrive from nations in which they do not have freedom of speech or choice. Their mistrust of authority, coupled with the possibility of deportation (made more real with the enactment of the 2001 Patriot Act), can erect formidable barriers against probes into lives, experiences, and feelings. (p. 569)

He asked for information, which she supplied. Predrag promised to call Denira with a date and time for the interview, but that did not happen. When Denira contacted him yet again, interview access was denied. Predrag said he was too busy.

Additional contact information on a number of individuals of Bosnian ethnicity was attained in July 2005 from the Giving and Learning refugee service organization. Children's ages were not provided. Actual contacts were needed to determine whether potential participants met the study criteria and were willing to be interviewed. At this juncture, a significant event put a halt to contacts within the Roma Bosnian culture. My interpreter took a new job and dropped her part time position as interpreter for the Prairieville school district. The time and effort already invested coupled with the loss of my interpreter caused me to move on to potential participants of the Sudanese and Liberian cultures. It was at this time that I decided to narrow my focus to one rather than three ethnicities and would pursue whichever ethnicity would give me participant access.

## Appendix E

### Proposal Abstract

Proposed Title: Language and Literacy Acquisition and Maintenance in Diverse Refugee Cultures

#### Nature of Proposed Study:

As the student population in U.S. schools continues to grow more linguistically diverse, there is an increasing need for schools to design programs that capitalize on what linguistically diverse children already know and bring with them to the classroom, especially in terms of their native language and literacy. In order to do this, more research needs to be done on family literacy practices and on the beliefs of how linguistically diverse parents want their children to be educated. This study aims to focus on the family literacy practices of refugee populations because this population comprises the majority of new English Language Learners in North Dakota. The question that will guide this study is *What goals do parents or guardians of culturally and linguistically diverse refugee learners and the learners themselves have regarding language and literacy acquisition and maintenance of their native and newly acquired languages?* This study will be conducted over several months in an urban area of the state.

#### Methodology:

This proposed study will include interviews, observations, and data collection of reading and writing materials. It will involve six families of refugee status from three diverse cultures. At least six adults and at least three children from six families will be involved in the study. I will conduct a series of three interviews with one or two parent-guardians from each participating family, observe parent-guardian/child and family interactions in at least one home environment from each culture, and with parent and child permission interview at least one child from each linguistically diverse refugee family. I will collect reading and writing materials which may be generated in the course of the observation. I will also collect original literacy materials or digital pictures or photocopies of original literacy materials from child participants. With child and parent permission, digital photographs of participants using literacy will also be taken. Data collected from interviews, observations, and literacy materials will be used to triangulate data.

#### Anticipated Results:

It is anticipated that this study will provide a better portrait of home literacy practices of refugee families. The values and goals of parent and child participants with regard to native and new language and literacy acquisition and maintenance will be identified. Hopefully this knowledge will benefit school districts that plan curriculum to meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse learners.



## Appendix F

### Coding and Analysis Procedures

Below I have enumerated the steps I took with the raw data to systematically discover themes and motifs.

1. Read through raw data from each participant making notes of salient points on small post-its.
2. Made an outline for participant's story using post-its as a guide.
3. Reread raw data. Added to outline as new categories emerged.
4. Color coded outline using colored post-it tape.
5. From a computer generated black line outline, used computer colored text to match colored post-it tape outline.
6. Referred to color coded outline to color code raw data hard copies from each participant using colored post-it tape.
7. Bracketed raw data of common themes or concepts that corresponded to color coded post-its.
8. Copied computer raw interview data to make new computer document working copies.
9. Read through data on computer working copies to color code according to computer generated outline.
10. Identified interviewer's questions and comments with black lettering.
11. Checked color coding on computer working copies against colored tabs in raw interview data.
12. Made category changes to reflect best classification for data.

13. Identified additional category separations in responses while producing color coded computer copies.
14. Expanded outline to accommodate additional categories.
15. Went through color coded data once again for each participant checking for accuracy according to the expanded outline making corrections as needed.
16. Opened new computer generated working documents for each participant.  
Following color coded outline, copied color coded data from each participant's working document and pasted into new working documents to separate categorized data from extraneous material.
17. Used original color coded working documents to present options for classifying data by copying passages in alternative colors and chronologically numbering to classify data.
18. Opened new computer generated working documents for each participant.
19. Following color coded outline, copied each participant's color coded data to new working documents placing data relating to specific themes together.
20. Kept each participant's prior working document used for data classification intact.
21. Moved data in working copies to support like themes and substantiate participant's story.
22. Coded the colored data with initials and numbers when the same data could apply to more than one classification.
23. Used raw data hard copies to authenticate context before moving data in working copies.

24. Reclassified data to support emerging themes.
25. Made hard copies of newly organized theme related, color coded data for each participant.
26. Read through each participant's color coded data one category at a time looking for common threads between and among responses.
27. Identified themes from each participant's responses and compared them to themes from all participants.
28. Identified most prevalent themes and themes that came from participants voluntarily during the interview process.
29. Generated a thematic map with a heading, salient themes, and assertions.
30. With the thematic map as a guide, wrote each participant's story.



## Appendix G

### Thematic Map and Assertions

Background Information	Communication in Home Prior to Formal School Education	Participants' Appreciation of Educational and Other Opportunities to Be Had in the United States
Self Preservation	Communication in Home Concurrent With Formal School Education	Parent Involvement in Sudanese Schools
Educational Background of Interviewees	Communication Outside of Home Setting	Parent Involvement in American Schools
Teaching Styles Used in Sudan	Language Preferences	Views on Language and Literacy Usage in American School Settings
Language and Literacy Goals Participants Have for Their Child	Language Influences	Views on the Use of Arabic Language and Literacy
	Translating Services Offered by Participants	Commitment to Education of Youth
	Societal Influences and Concerns	

#### Participant Background, Values, and Goals

#### Language and Literacy Usage

#### Parent Involvement and Other Issues

1. Participants fled their native country to seek political asylum from ethnic cleansing	1. Language immersion in early childhood and pre-school settings is crucial to fluent acquisition of the family's tribal language or colloquial Arabic.	1. People of Sudanese ethnicity value the educational and career opportunities made possible for their children in the United States.
2. Male participants have higher levels of formal education than female participants.	2. Communication with their child predominantly in English rather than parent participant's tribal language or colloquial Arabic causes loss of speaking ability in those languages.	2. People of Sudanese ethnicity want their children to achieve success in their adopted country while maintaining aspects of their native language and culture.
3. Language and literacy goals vary among parent participants.	3. Children lose communication ability with extended family and friends who live in Sudan and speak tribal languages or colloquial Arabic and those who live in the United States but are not proficient in English.	3. Active participation toward the advancement of education in Sudan and in the United States had been taken by male participants.

#### Assertions

Refugee parents of Sudanese ethnicity value the acquisition of English language and literacy for their young children but vary in their values about maintaining tribal languages or colloquial Arabic.

Refugee parents of Sudanese ethnicity who practice language immersion of their tribal language or colloquial Arabic with their early childhood and pre-school children enable the acquisition and maintenance of those languages while their children learn the English language.



Appendix H  
Sudan Map



Retrieved March 11, 2007, from <http://www.pnm.my/mtcp/images/maps/Sudan-map.jpg>



## Appendix I

### Interview Questions

#### Parent Interview Questions

##### One Interview – Running 60 to 90 minutes

#### **1st Interview – Focus on Language Acquisition and Maintenance**

1. Tell me how language was used in your home before your child entered school. Was one language used more often than another? Was the language you preferred using the same as the language your child preferred using? What kinds of things did you do with your child to help him/her learn how to use language? Did language preference change in your family when your child entered school? If so, why and in what way did changes occur?
2. Is learning to speak English a goal you have for your child? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties your child has/had in learning to speak English? What works well for your child as he/she is learning to speak English?
3. Is learning to speak English a goal you have for yourself? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties you have/had in learning to speak English? What works/ed well for you as you learn/learned to speak English?
4. Is learning to speak or maintain your native language a goal you have for your child? Why do/don't you choose to have this goal? If this is a goal, would you like to see the learning happen at home or in a school setting?
5. If your child can speak your native language, what do you remember about your child as he/she was learning to talk? If your child can speak English, what can you tell me about your child as he/she was learning the language?

#### **2nd Interview – Focus on Literacy Acquisition and Maintenance**

1. Tell me about reading and writing habits of family members. Is reading material available in your home? If so, what language is most frequently used in the reading material? What type of reading material is available? How do family members use writing? What language is most frequently used by family members when reading or writing?
2. Is learning to read English a goal you have for your child? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties your child has/had in learning to read English? What works well for your child as he/she is learning to read English?
3. Is learning to read English a goal you have for yourself? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties you have/had in learning to read English? What works/ed well for you as you learn/learned to read English?
4. Is learning to read and write in your native language a goal you have for your child? Why do/don't you choose to have this goal? If this is a goal, would you like to see the learning happen at home or in a school setting?



5. If your child can read and write in your native language, what do you remember about your child as he/she was learning to read and write? If your child can read and write English, what can you tell me about your child as he/she was learning to read and write?

### **3rd Interview – Focus on Literacy, Teacher, School, and Social Relationships**

1. What can you tell me about how learning to read and write is taught in your native country? What can you tell me about how teachers in your native country relate to their students? What works well for your child as he/she relates to teachers in the school he/she attends in this country? Is there something about your child's educational experience in this country that pleases you? Is there anything about your child's educational experience that you would like to see handled differently?
2. Are parents involved with their children's education in your native country? If so, in what way are they involved? Were you involved in your child's education in your native country? If so, in what way were you involved? Are you involved with your child's education in this country? If so, in what way are you involved? If you are not involved in your child's education in this country and would like to be involved, in what way would you like to see this happen?
3. Do you feel your child has had difficulties or misunderstandings that may have been due to cultural differences between your child and his/her teacher? If your answer is yes, can you tell me what caused the differences or misunderstandings and how were they resolved? Were you satisfied in the way things were handled? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel your child has had difficulties or misunderstandings that may have been due to cultural differences between your child and other students? If your answer is yes, can you tell me what caused the differences or misunderstandings and how were they resolved? Were you satisfied in the way things were handled? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel your child has had difficulties or misunderstandings that may have been due to cultural differences between your child and the expectations of the school administration? If your answer is yes, can you tell me what caused the differences or misunderstandings and how were they resolved? Were you satisfied in the way things were handled? Why or why not?
6. Tell me what your child likes about the school he/she attends.
7. Tell me about your child's friends. Does he/she play with friends at school, at home, or outside of the home? When your child plays with others, what language do the children use to communicate?
8. If you have any concerns for your child, what are they?
9. Tell me what makes you feel good about your child's life.

## Appendix J

### Adapted Interview Questions

Parent Interview Questions - 1 Interview – 60 minutes

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Focus - Language Acquisition and Maintenance

1. Tell me what makes you feel good about your child's life. How old was your child when you came to this country?
2. Can you tell me how language was used in your home before your child started school? Was one language used more than another? What did you do with your child to help him/her learn how to use language? Did the language you use in the home change when your child entered school? Why did it change? How did it change?
3. Is it important to you that your child can speak English? Why do you feel this way?
4. Is it important to you to learn how to speak English? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties you have/had in learning to speak English? What works well for you as you learn to speak English?
5. Is it important to you that your child speak your native language? Why do you feel this way? If this is important to you, would you like to have your child speak your native language in school as well as at home? Why do you feel this way?
6. If your child can speak your native language, what do you remember about your child as he/she was learning to talk? What kinds of things did you do to help your child learn your language? Did you tell stories to your child before they entered school? Do you tell stories to your child now? If you do, what kinds of stories do you tell?

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Focus - Literacy Acquisition and Maintenance

1. Do you use your native language to read? Do you have any reading material in your home? What kinds of reading material do you have? What language is used in the reading material?
2. Do you or does anyone in your family read to your child? What language is used? What kinds of reading material are used when someone reads to your child?
3. Do you or other members of your family use your native language to write? If writing is used, how is it used? What language is used by you or other family members when writing?
4. Is it important to you to learn how to write in English? Why do you feel this way? What are some of the difficulties you have/had in learning to write in English? What works/ed well for you as you learn/learned to write in English?
5. Is it important to you to have your child learn how to write in your native language? Why do you feel this way? If you would like to have your child write in your native language, would you like to see the learning happen at home or at school?
6. If your child can read and write in your native language, what do you remember about your child as he/she was learning to read and write? Is it important to you for your child to keep his/her skills in your native language? If this is important to you, do you want to teach your child at home, or do you want your child to learn to read and write in your native language at school?



### 3rd Focus - Literacy, Teacher, School, and Social Relationships

1. What can you tell me about how learning to read and write is taught in your native country?  
What can you tell me about how teachers in your native country teach their students?
2. Are parents involved with their children's education in your native country? How are they involved? Were you involved in your child's education in your native country? How were you involved? Are you involved with your child's education in this country? How are you involved?
3. Do you feel your child has difficulties or misunderstandings that may be caused by cultural differences between your child and his/her teacher?
4. Do you feel your child has difficulties or misunderstandings that may be caused by cultural differences between your child and other students?
5. Do you feel your child has difficulties or misunderstandings that may be caused by cultural differences between your child and what the school leaders expect of your child?
6. Tell me what your child likes or doesn't like about the school he/she attends.
7. Tell me about your child's friends. Does he/she play with friends at school, at home, or outside the home? When your child plays with friends, what language is used to communicate?
8. If you have any concerns for your child, what are they? What hopes and dreams do you have for your child?



Appendix K  
Parent Interview Format for Teachers

Background Information:

- Date
- Name
- Location
- Number of children, ages, grade level
- School district/region
- Length of time in area
- Length of time in the United States
- Native country
- Primary language

1. What would you like your child's teacher to know about your language and culture?
2. What kind of training should teachers have to work with children and families from different cultures?
3. In your view, what are the most important characteristics of a good teacher for your children?
4. What are the most important requirements for a good home-school relationship?  
What are some of the barriers?
5. What would you like for your child to learn about her (or his) culture and language in school? Do you think that the school should teach your native language to help your child maintain it?
6. Are you actively involved in your children's school? If not, what prevents your participation? How can the school help you to participate?
7. What are you most satisfied with in your child's present schooling? Least satisfied?

(Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995, p. 352)

Appendix L  
Positive and Negative Ways of Working With Refugee Parents

Not this . . .	But this . . .
Minority parents viewed as helpless or uneducated.	Teachers need parents and what they have to offer to schools.
Minority parents viewed as requiring special therapy, counseling, or assistance.	Many minority parents . . . are well-adjusted and capable of making sound educational decisions and judgments.
Purposely remaining distant from minority parents to ensure one's objectivity and credibility or out of fear due to lack of understanding of their culture.	Knowledge about the student's family and sociocultural background can contribute greatly to a teacher's objective and credible decision-making.
Continually questioning the minor parents' perceptions about their children and learning needs.	Minority parents often know what is best for their children, including culturally appropriate solutions to educational concerns.
Insensitivity to cultural customs and heritages.	Minority parents must believe that teachers are genuinely concerned about them, their children, and cultural customs.
Continually expecting problems when interacting with parents of minority students.	Although prior encounters with difficult parents may exist, each new encounter must be entered into with an open mind and positive feelings toward a successful meeting.
Limiting interactions with minority parents due to language or cultural differences.	A language or cultural difference is an unacceptable reason for lack of parent-teacher communication. Training in cross-cultural communication may be useful in this process.

(Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995, p. 359)

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